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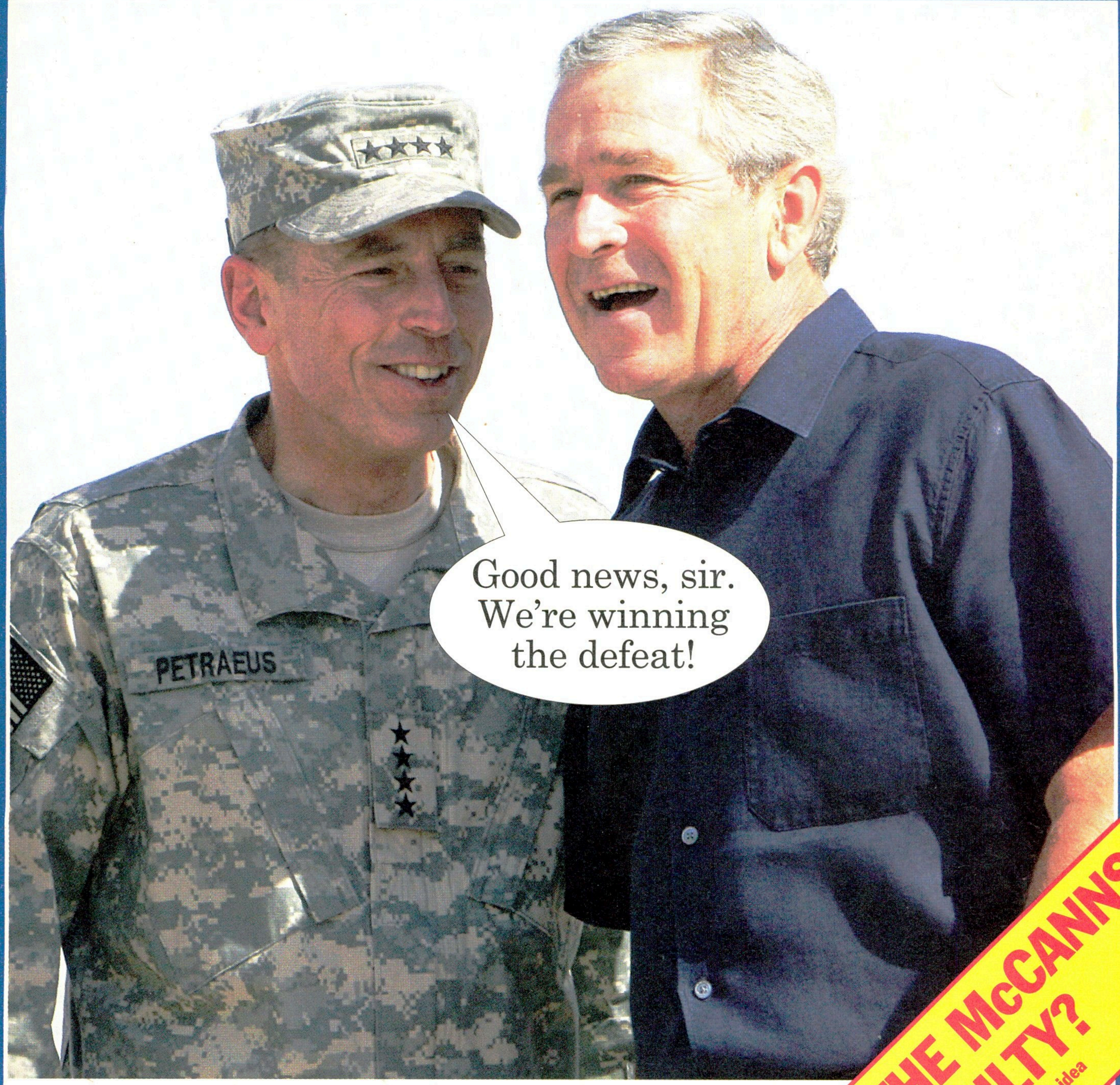

ARE THE McCANNS GUILTY?

We have no idea

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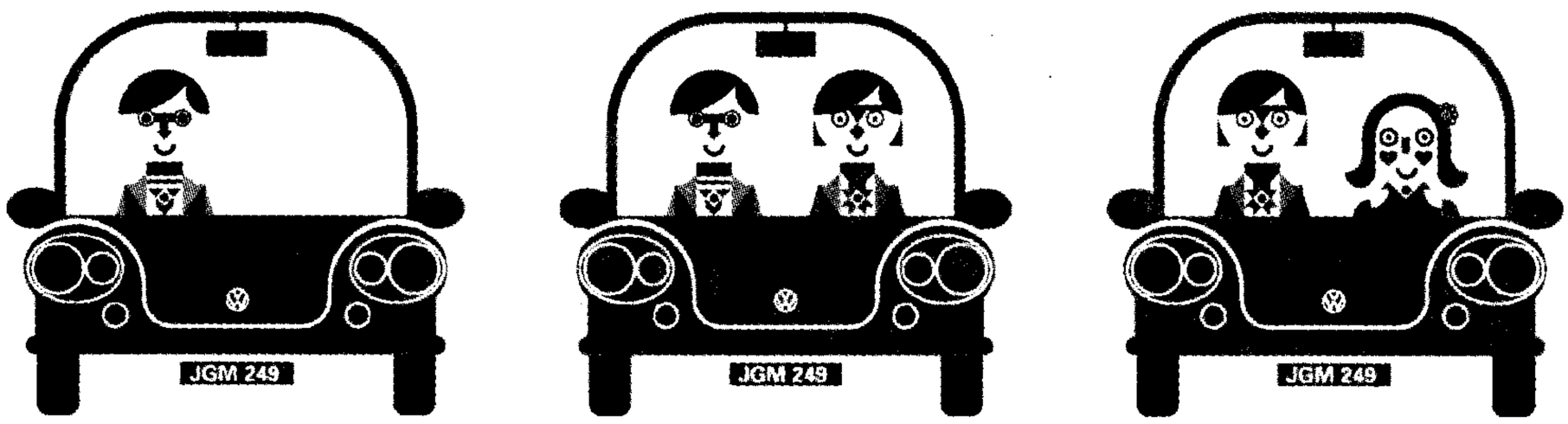

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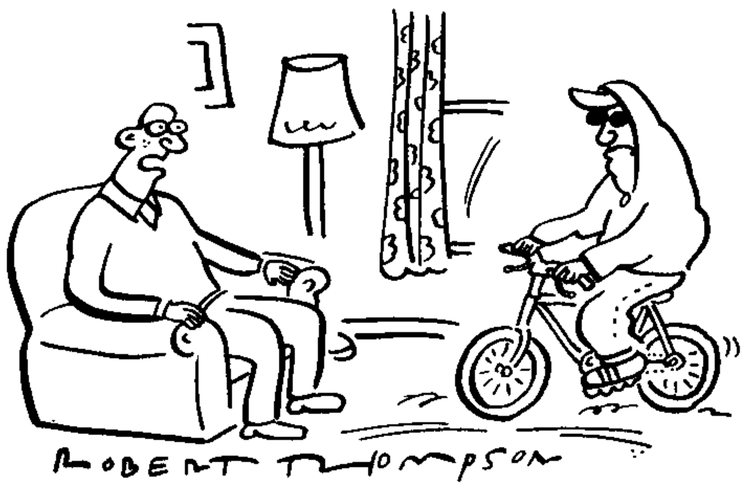

"And where are you going, dressed to kill?"

News

- **Opera legend Pavarotti dies at 71**
- Madeleine's mother to be questioned

BBC News online

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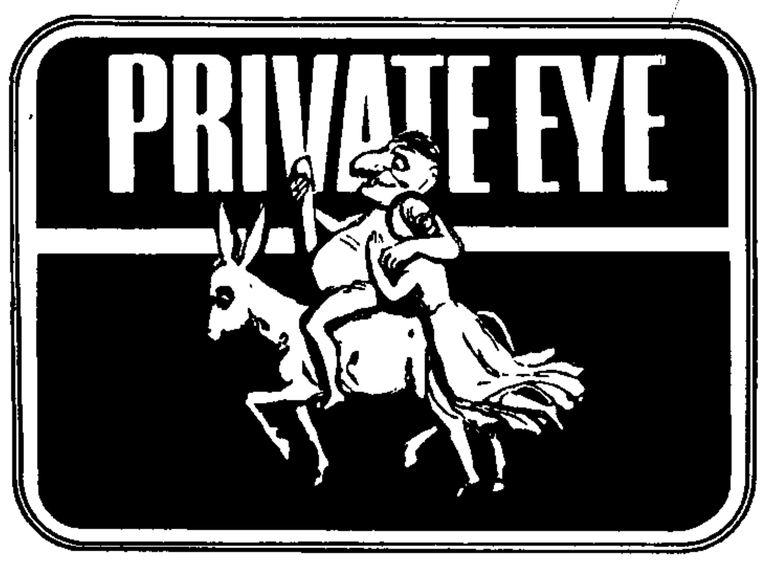

The Bush telegraph

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- **Gordon's tax gap; Boris's babes; and the other Mr Desmond: HP Sauce** 6, 7
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- **Iraq: A red light in the green zone** 28
- **Palace in Wonderland? An FOI special** 30

RARE patriotism on display at Barclays bank, arguably the country's most prolific tax avoider. And funnily enough it comes just as the bank is forced to ask the Bank of England for more "liquidity", ie a bail out, to relieve a "credit crunch" in the money markets in the wake of the sub-prime mortgage scandal – a crisis in no small part of its own making.

The bank's head of media relations, Alistair Smith, wrote to the *Financial Times* last week to answer a reader's concern that, if and when it merges with Dutch bank ABN Amro, Barclays might "[move] its head office to the Netherlands". Smith insisted that "as stated in our announcement on 23 April, Barclays, which will be the holding company for the combined group, will remain UK incorporated, and is expected to remain UK tax resident".

The PR man must have been hoping nobody would dig out the 23 April announcement, because it also says: "The head office for the combined group will be located in Amsterdam." Such a move would allow much of the bank's business to be channelled offshore and would be, in the language preferred by the tax avoidance industry, highly "tax efficient". Best not mention that bit when you're pleading for special favours back in Blighty.

THE recent stock market crisis hit just a month after the government's Pensions Act became law in July – unfortunate timing as central to the new rules are the personal pension accounts through which millions of low earners will have their pensions thrown at the mercy of... the stock market.

The suspicion that the great pensions transformation might not be the roaring success officially predicted isn't helped by the state of the government's Pensions Service and the disappearance of the scheme's architects. Not only has Gordon Brown shifted pensions secretary John Hutton over to the business and regulation brief and moved out junior pensions ministers, but now the chief executive of the Pensions Service, Alexis Cleveland, has resigned to work on "trans-formational government" in the Cabinet Office. Chief operating officer Janet Grossman has jumped ship altogether to join Cable & Wireless.

Report after report into large government projects has stressed the importance of continuity in managing them; it's no good dreaming them up then buggering off. If you do they tend to crash – just like an over-inflated stock market, in fact.

AS THE Penhallow Hotel in Newquay blazed last month, firefighters discovered that the closest fire hydrants were clogged with mud, sand and debris. Searching for usable ones wasted precious time.

The county's fire hydrants are owned by South West Water and checking them used to be the job of the Fire Service. In 2001, however, that job was farmed out to private contractor WS Atkins under "facilities management" as part of a £40m PFI deal.

According to records, WS Atkins checked the Newquay hydrant visually for silting in January, as it is contracted to do. But local firefighters say that hydrants should be regularly "wet tested" (to make sure water comes out of them), especially on the coast, where silting is more likely. The *Western Morning News* revealed that Devon has two full-time hydrant officers out and about to check for problems.

The Newquay fire was "definitely not the first time" Cornish firefighters responding to an incident had encountered silted hydrants, said regional Fire Brigades Union secretary John Drake, and the issue was raised with management a few months ago. The union is doing a national survey to discover the scale of the problem.

Meanwhile Cornwall county council has put cutbacks at Camborne and Falmouth fire stations on hold until the implications of the hotel fire have been "fully evaluated".

JOINED-UP GOVERNMENT

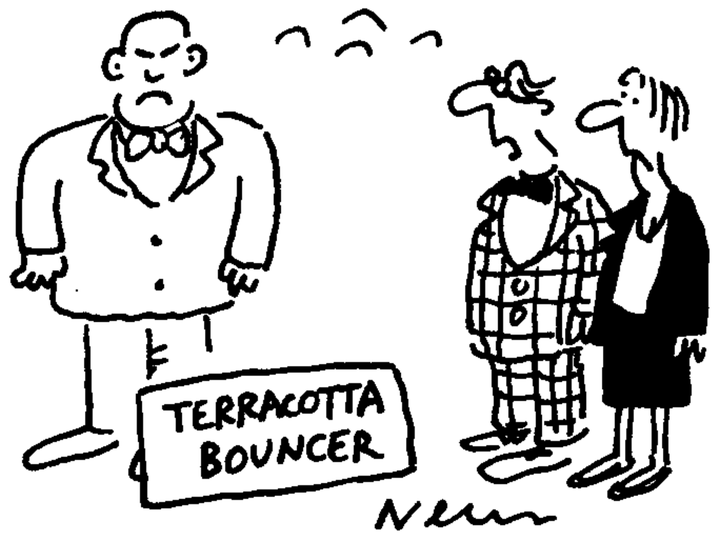
March 2007: Jack Straw, then leader of the Commons, describes Tory MP Patrick Mercer's comments on racism in the army as "breathtaking and dreadful". Defence minister Adam Ingram calls them "shocking and unacceptable".

September 2007: Gordon Brown welcomes Tory MP Patrick Mercer as an adviser on national security, as an example of "a new type of politics which embraces everyone, not just a few, a politics built on consensus, not division".

SIMON Heffer's constant criticism of David Cameron in the *Telegraph* is beginning to goad poor Dave beyond endurance. During his holiday in Brittany last month, the Tory leader was lunching one day with Tory treasurer Lord Marland, who has a holiday apartment out there – and who mentioned that Hefferlump sometimes rents a particular house in Dinard for his summer hols.

"Right!" Dave roared, rising from the table. "Let's go over there and settle this Heffer business *now!*" Marland pointed out that the *Telegraph* pundit might not actually have rented the place this year, and that it was a bit of a journey, and anyway aren't holidays meant to be for relaxation...?

All to no avail. Cameron was ready for battle. Marland had to drive him to Dinard and lead him to the front door of the house. Alas! What terrible vengeance he planned will never be known: the villa turned out to be occupied by a blameless and wholly unHefferish family. Cameron stomped off red-faced with rage and embarrassment – while, far away, Simon Heffer continued his sedate motoring holiday in the Bavarian Alps. Poop poop!



"He's ex-Terracotta Army"

OLYMPIAN I-DEALS

THE Olympics gravy train is clearly awash with cash – Paul Deighton, the London Organising Committee chief executive, earned £636,000 last year with his bonus, while Princess Anne pocketed £4,000 for attending a couple of meetings – but some things are just too absurdly expensive.

Hence the Olympic Delivery Authority's (ODA) "no thanks" to the PFI industry which had wanted development of London 2012 to be funded through a private finance initiative. Only the utilities – water and electricity – were to use PFI, but even this has been rejected now that the companies have submitted their massively expensive bids. The tendering process, minus private finance, will now start all over again.

Unlike the rest of the public sector, at least the ODA had the option to reject PFI and avoid being saddled, as hospitals and schools are, with unaffordable commitments. In fact, next to PFI, the entire overblown Olympics (cost: £9.3bn and rising) looks like a model of sound financial judgement.

● *Olympian I-deals, p4*

THINGS just get better for veterans of the mis-sold London 2012 Olympics bid as would-be host cities clamour for their services.

PR chief Mike Lee, now running an outfit called Vero, has been drafted in by the Gulf state of Qatar to push its 2016 bid. He'll be joined in the effort by "strategist", aka agent, Andrew Craig, who organised the London 2012 lobbying effort.

Craig and Lee might have to adapt the strategy they used for London somewhat. The notion of empowering the grass roots might not be to the taste of the ruling al-Thani family, whose style is more associated with restricting workers' freedoms and rights (especially those of the migrant labourers who will have to build the facilities).

Expect political difficulties to be turned to advantage, however. Bid chairman and Qatari businessman Hassan Ali bin Ali has already said: "We believe we are ideally placed to create a bridge between the Arab countries and the rest of the world." Sounds like the PR has started already.

NOT THAT there's a great deal of democratic accountability when it comes to the London 2012 games either.

After several months' stonewalling the *Eye's* requests for details of how much Craig and other seasoned Olympic schmoozers were paid (out of public money) to secure the International Olympic Committee vote for London, the Department of Culture Media and Sport has refused to give the figures on the grounds that they constitute "personal data". A cursory look at the rules shows this to be nonsense: commercial payments by public bodies are routinely disclosed.

The DCMS also claims that revealing how much it paid would "prejudice the commercial interests" of the agents as they "continue to seek contracts from bidding companies in similar roles to those they held in relation to the 2012 bid". Such interests, says DCMS, outweigh the public's in knowing how its money is spent. So much for the people's games.

NEWS FROM THE SANDPIT

A TIDAL wave of criticism about the pisspoor state of patrol vehicles in Iraq and the 'Stan has at last stirred the MoD into action. Now embarrassing questions are being asked in parliament about the Ministry's lateness in finding alternatives to the ancient and unsuitable Snatch Land Rovers.

In a fit of panic buying, the MoD has settled on two replacements; one, the UK-made MWMIK, has a top speed of 80mph (on Afghanistan's crappy roads?) but absolutely no protection. The driver and two crew are exposed to AK fire front and flank and, since they are all positioned above the vehicle's axles, to the worst effects of compression mines as well.

Speed and agility are useless accessories in urban areas and off-road. In order to fire the heavy weapons it carries with any effect, the vehicle would have to halt anyway. As a result, the US Marines fitted armoured cabs to their version of the MWMIK. We haven't.

The MoD has also placed orders for the well armoured Mastiff, which is impervious to small arms fire, RPGs and even landmines. It's based on the American Cougar, but the MoD couldn't resist tampering by fitting vertical armour plates that block vision and weapon firing ports. As one journo observed, "the crew is thus blind and disarmed, which does not make much sense in an urban combat context".

'Squarebasher'

Street of Shame

AS PART of its tenth-anniversary Diana-fest, the *Daily Mail* reprinted Lynda Lee-Potter's tribute, first published the day after the People's Princess died. "Throughout their childhood she gave her sons endless loving cuddles," Ms Lee-Slagg sighed. "She adored her children." Sadly, the *Mail* didn't see fit to reprint the column Lee-Potter wrote a mere five days earlier, headlined "Why Diana is Such a Poor Mother to Her Boys", which slagged her off as an irresponsible parent who had inflicted "damage, anguish and hurt" on her children.

There was another striking gap in the *Mail*'s series. The reprint of its edition of 8 September 1997 didn't include one of that day's most prominent stories, "*Mail* Leads the Way in Banning Paparazzi Pictures", which boasted that the paper would never again purchase snatched photos of celebs canoodling or vacationing. A wise omission – for of course the *Mail* has blithely carried on running paparazzi shots ever since.

In the very week of its tenth-anniversary series, there were photos of Chris Tarrant snogging his "new blonde" on holiday in Capri and of Amy Winehouse snogging her husband on holiday in St Lucia, "showing off a worryingly boyish body covered with tattoos". As the paper noted, Winehouse has "battled anorexia and bulimia". Just like Di!

QUOTE OF THE WEEK 1

"… and the Royal Family are celebrating… sorry – the Royal Family and celebrities are *mourning*…"

– Radio 5 Live presenter at the memorial service for Diana, Princess of Wales, 7.30am, 31 August

"THERE are very few people in Britain who have not been shocked and depressed by the way the Ministry of Defence has handled the 15 sailors and Marines since their release from Iranian captivity," thundered the *Telegraph* in April after two of the former hostages sold their stories to the tabloids.

"It has mocked the many other men and women who have suffered in silence while serving their country, with no reward except the knowledge that they were doing their duty… Relations of members of the Armed Services killed in Iraq, who would not dream of selling their stories, feel particularly strongly on this subject. And who can blame them?"

This week those same relations, along with the rest of the shocked and depressed people in Britain, got the first chance to read the revelations of no less a figure than Sir Mike Jackson, head of the British Army during the invasion of Iraq, for which he received a reported advance of £900,000 from publisher Transworld.

Where did this tawdry tale appear? It was, the paper boasted, "serialised exclusively in the *Daily Telegraph*".

THE *Daily Mail*, that scourge of capitalism, was quick to pick up on the *Guardian*'s annual survey of boardroom pay, which found that "directors of Britain's top firms saw their pay soar 37 percent last year… Some 81 received annual bonuses of over £1m."

Quoting Martin Narey, chief executive of the children's charity Barnardo's ("The inequality this represents should shame us as a society"), the *Mail* duly named and shamed some of the most voracious snouts in this trough of greed.

Strangely, however, it didn't mention the Daily Mail & General Trust – the only company to feature in the top 10 for annual cash bonuses (with one executive trousering £2m) and the top 10 for chairmen's salaries (£827,000), as well as having two of its employees (including *Daily Mail* editor Paul Dacre) listed at third and fourth place in the league-table of British executives with the biggest pension pots.

Why so coy?

NEWS that a family of meerkats at Longleat Safari Park had managed to take photos of each other using a camera left unattended in their enclosure had picture editors standing up on their hind legs right across Fleet Street.

"That's what you call wildlife photography," chuckled the *Times*. "Candid Cameera", the *Sun* chortled, while the *Mail* went for "Smile! You're on Meerkat camera" and the *Mirror* opted for the definitive "Monty the Meerkat's photo album: yes, he did take them!"

So how did these publications, every one of which revelled in the BBC's discomforts over fakery in its output, react when less than 24 hours later, *Amateur Photographer* magazine pointed out that the blurry snaps could hardly have been found on the camera's memory card, as claimed, since the model in question was a 20-year-old Canon which uses film – and, furthermore, forced Longleat warden Keith Harris to admit that "it started off as a joke. It was a slight hoax. The meerkats didn't take any pictures at all"?

While the *Telegraph* ("Photographers? They're a bunch of animals") managed to carry a clarification on its website (but not in the paper itself), not one of the others felt any need to enlighten their readers.

QUOTE OF THE WEEK 2

"THERE is an editor-in-chief structure, which means we are all firing in the same direction." – *Will Lewis, editor of the* Daily Telegraph, *just after the company, er, fired its seventh editor in four years (Patience Wheatcroft, ex-*Sunday Telegraph*)*

***GUARDIAN* feature writer Kira Cochrane was "stopped in my tracks" by the new *Vanity Fair* cover featuring a pouting Nicole Kidman "holding her shirt open to expose her white, bra-clad breasts... for no apparent reason".**

So appalled was Cochrane that she wrote a 950-word piece for *G2,* bemoaning the fact that "no matter how talented a woman is, how intelligent... if she wants to stay in the public eye, if she wants the magazine covers and leading roles, she has to be willing to reduce herself to tits and arse". It was nostalgic stuff for older readers, recalling the feminist heyday of the *Grauniad* Wimmin's Section in the 1980s.

This being *G2* in the Noughties, however, it was necessary to illustrate Cochrane's piece, which occupied less than a page of text, with a quarter-page picture of Kidman in her bra... a sultry full-page picture of actress Maggie Gyllenhaal in a basque and black stockings, half a page of Keira Knightley and Scarlett Johansson in the buff, plus, to drive home the point, smaller pictures of magazine covers featuring Teri Hatcher, Jennifer Aniston, Kate Winslet and Angelina Jolie wearing not very much, spread over a total of four pages.

"A CAR in the wrong hands is as deadly as a gun or knife," declared the *Sun*'s editorial column on 7 September, declaring the beginning of a "Nail The Danger Drivers" campaign.

"The decision to get tough with those who abuse their licence to drive is long overdue... Drivers race where there is no risk of being Gatsoed and routinely jump traffic lights long after they go red," the paper pointed out.

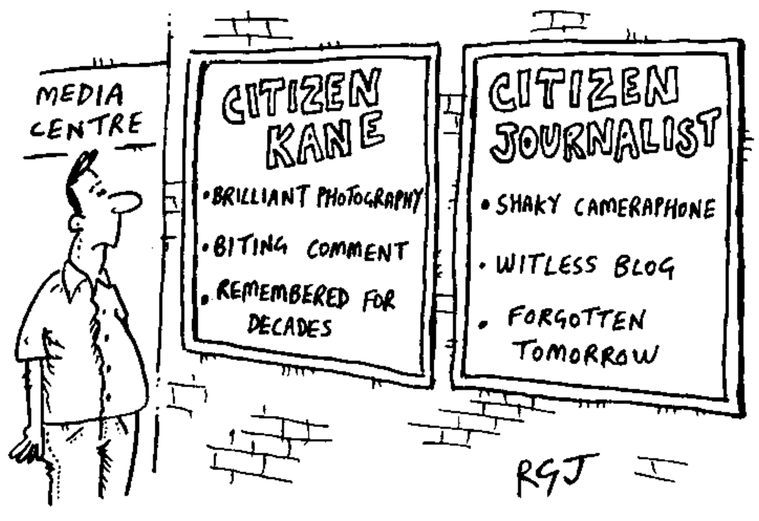
Elsewhere in the same day's paper, readers were invited to admire the UK's first stretch Ferrari, for hire for a "real driving experience... It does 170mph at a stretch" the paper frothed – and rejoice in pictures of chief constable Richard Brunstrom, who has cracked down on speeding drivers in North Wales, experiencing a Taser blast from fellow officers in a training video.

"A picture to delight all drivers," the paper chortled. "Mad Mullah of the traffic Taliban tasered."

IS THE *Guardian* regretting its enthusiastic front-page puff for Hollywood comedy *Knocked Up*, which just happened to appear on the same day as a mind-blowingly expensive wrap-around advert paid for by the film's promoters (see *Eye* 1192)?

The film of Ian McEwan's *Atonement*, a *Guardian*-friendly flick if ever there was one, got no such treatment when its distributors purchased a similar wrap-around a week later. But a four-page piece by film critic Joe Queenan, denouncing *Knocked Up* as "offensive, misogynist nonsense... a sign that feminism is dead" on 4 September, did. That came days after former women's editor Libby Brooks had waded into battle on the paper's *Comment is Free* website accusing it of being "the longest pro-life propaganda movie ever to make it into the mainstream".

One day later, the paper washed its hands of the film entirely and threw the matter open to readers with a poll on its arts pages: "Is *Knocked Up* misogynistic? Yes or no?"



MADDIEBALLS

Clueless investigators

"Kate and Gerry McCann may have to wait a year to discover whether they will be charged or cleared over the disappearance of their daughter Madeleine, they were warned yesterday." – *Daily Telegraph, 10 September*

"Detectives are determined to charge Mrs McCann with accidental homicide... The couple could be forced to return to Portugal within weeks." – *Daily Mail, 10 September*

"The police will get the results of new British tests in days. Then they will make their move." – *Daily Mirror, 10 September*

Finest humbug

"The police chief leading the assault on Kate and Gerry McCann is a stocky detective with a penchant for taking long lunches," the *Daily Mail* noted disapprovingly on Monday. He sounds eerily like red-faced *Mail* hack Brian "Vino" Vine, famous for his girth and his flabbergasting expense account – yet when Vine died last year the *Mail* hailed him as a "Fleet Street legend".

An unidentified "source" gave the *Mail* another damning detail about Guilhermino Encarnacao, director of Faro police: "He likes to stay behind his desk and send everyone else out into the field." Eerily like *Mail* editor Paul Dacre!

But then the "source" delivered the killer blow: "Other officers jokingly refer to Guilhermino as Inspector Clueless." A cunning pun on Clouseau, geddit?! But, er, Inspector Clueless in Portuguese would be *Inspetor Incompetente* or *Inspetor Estúpido*. So Portuguese officers have given him a punning nickname that works only when translated into English by the *Daily Mail*? Yeah, right.

Psychological insights

"Being suddenly under suspicion will reinforce the feeling of being persecuted and victimised: Oliver James, psychologist" – *Times, 8 September*

"They face suffering from periods of depression and guilt, and will 'never be the same people they were when they left'. Dr Glenn Wilson, from King's College, London, said: 'It is something they are going to have to live with for the rest of their lives'." – *Telegraph, 10 September*

Benefit of hindsight

"The nation took Kate and Gerry McCann to its heart... Yet have you never felt a sense of unease at their omnipresence in the papers and on television?" asked Andrew Pierce in the *Daily Telegraph* last Saturday.

"No aspect of their grief seemed out of bounds. We have seen them deep in prayer in church. There was the photograph of them walking arm-in-arm on a deserted beach, reminiscent of Diana photographed alone at a conveniently empty Taj Mahal. And then there is the almost pitiful sight of Mrs McCann clutching Madeleine's favourite cuddly toy. Was I alone in wondering whether that was for comfort or because it was what the PR advisers suggested?"

But why did Pierce wonder? The PR stunts which leave him uneasy were justified in a long *Daily Telegraph* piece as far back as 18 May ("Finding Madeleine: The Mission that Drives Her Parents Through the Days of Torment") which revealed that all public appearances were "carefully stage-managed" by the McCanns and their advisers. "They have deliberately devised the photo-opportunities because they dread the media interest draining away," it explained sympathetically, and with no hint of unease. "They are desperate to keep Madeleine on the front pages because they think it may lead to a sighting." The author? Andrew Pierce.

Even more humbug

"Madeleine's parents have had to endure a daily torrent of smears and lies from the Portuguese media. Kate and Gerry's strenuous denials have failed to dampen the press's appetite for scandal."– *Express, 8 September*

"DAILY EXPRESS HAS LED THE WAY: Here is a selection of our unrivalled reporting... August 25: PARENTS ARE ACCUSED OF KILLING MADELEINE WITH A DRUG OVERDOSE, August 29: FATHER STORMS OUT OF TV INTERVIEW, August 30: 'SYRINGE FOUND IN MADELEINE'S APARTMENT', September 1: PARENTS: We're going home POLICE: Wait for DNA tests, September 6: MADELEINE ARREST IS NOW 'CLOSE'" – *Express, 8 September*

JUST FANCY THAT!

"To be honest I don't read the papers a lot. When I know it's going to be bad I tend not to read them at all." – Michael Vaughan, *Observer*, 26 August.

"Under Nasser Hussain, newspapers weren't even allowed in the dressing room... Michael Vaughan, on the other hand, will buy every paper under the sun." – England team-mate Matthew Hoggard, *Observer*, 2 September.

THE *Independent on Sunday*'s thin diary is these days bylined "Sindy" and bears a picture of its supposed author, a woman in a headscarf (she's meant to be called Sindy Pendant – *geddit*?)

Recently the column gave generous mention to a coming concert by Fleet Street's jazz critics, including one Sholto Byrnes of the *Independent on Sunday*. It was a soft item for a diary column, by any standards. So who was "Sindy" that week? Why, none other than a certain Sholto Byrnes!

WIKIPEDIA WHISPERS

WIKIPEDIA has once again spared the blushes of Rupert Murdoch and his gorgeous, pouting gerontophilic bride, Wendi Deng.

We told in the last *Eye* how Deng's own Wikipedia entry was rewritten (by a loyal employee of the Dirty Digger) to omit embarrassing details. But she and Rupert still had an unwelcome mention in another entry, headed "Age disparity in sexual relationships", as they appeared alongside such notables as J. Howard Marshall and Anna Nicole Smith in a list of famous relationships that have broken the "half-your-age plus seven rule" which purportedly sets the limits of socially acceptable age differences. Rupert, it noted, is 38 years older than Wendi.

On 24 August the Murdochs disappeared from the entry. The unnamed "page patroller" responsible explained that the deleted passage was "trivia" which "adds nothing to the understanding in this article".

MIND THE TAX GAP

THE TUC general secretary Brendan Barber may believe that loopholes allow the super-rich to "float free" while only "the little people" actually cough up tax, but does anyone agree with him?

"It is ridiculous to suggest that business does not pay its fair share of tax," thundered HM Revenue & Customs after the National Audit Office (NAO) found that two thirds of the 700 largest companies in the UK pay minimal tax on their profits, prompting the Commons public accounts committee to launch an inquiry.

But why should the taxman jump to the defence of big business so quickly? Perhaps because, although it knows tax dodging by large companies costs billions, it is cutting tax investigations.

Former HMRC chairman Sir David Varney this year proposed reining in probes into multinationals' tax affairs even though they avoid the most tax. His ideas were warmly welcomed by the then chancellor, Gordon Brown, who was busy pushing through 25,000 job cuts under an "efficiency" programme that even tax advisers say is draining HMRC of crucial experience. *Eye* 1165 revealed leaked official figures proving that many job cuts directly cost several times in lost tax what they shave from the wage bill.

HMRC is particularly coy about the tax lost to evasion and legal avoidance, refusing to divulge its estimates of the so-called "tax gap" (almost certainly several tens of billions of pounds a year). The Information Commissioner recently ruled in favour of the *Eye's* request for details but HMRC has appealed to the Information Tribunal (costing more taxpayer money) to keep it secret.

Much, perhaps most, of the lost tax disappears in the legal wheezes that many large companies favour and which, despite a hyperbolic undertaking from HMRC director Dave Hartnett two years ago to make tax avoidance "not worthwhile" by 2008, continue. In just the three months to March 2007, 67 new types of tax avoidance scheme were notified under "disclosure" rules introduced three years ago, most of them pushed by the big accountancy and law firms.

Many commentators, including the *Eye*, have been calling for Parliament to take corporate tax dodging seriously for years. Now MPs are at last looking at it they will want to know what HMRC is doing about the problem – if the taxman's not too engrossed in his corporate love-in.

THE big accountancy firms' tax dodging has again been exposed in a tribunal's rejection of internet entrepreneur Jason Drummond's attempts to escape a £2m tax bill with a little help from KPMG.

The wheeze involved Drummond buying rights to other people's life insurance policies before surrendering them to create tax losses that would wipe out otherwise taxable gains. So impressed with the scheme was KPMG that it adopted it as a "preferred strategy" for other rich clients.

Alas, tribunal chairman Stephen Oliver QC saw through the scam and struck it out. There was "no purpose in… Mr Drummond's purchase of the rights to the five policies other than the facilitation of the tax avoidance strategy", while the banks involved were "acting out a charade".

The defeat doesn't look too clever for KPMG, always keen to brag of its social responsibility. In charge of the firm at the time was Mike Rake, latterly chairman of Business in the Community… and now chairman of Gordon Brown's Commission for Employment and Skills!

O·B·N

"Watched Gordon Brown deliver his pre-budget report. He wiped the floor. The Tories hardly bother to attack. No disrespect to my husband when I say that listening to Gordon at his best is better than sex."

OONA KING
Oona King's Diaries

Submitted by Mark Jenkins

"Sir Gulam Noon is almost a Nelson Mandela figure in his generosity of spirit. He was dragged unjustly through that fiasco. The same for Sir Christopher Evans… we need more of them."

SIMON WOODROFFE
Sky News

Submitted by Strobes

CALLED TO ORDURE

PART of Boris Johnson's electoral appeal is that he is in some ways a non-politician who does things differently. But the official launch of his bid to be London mayor tried many of the tired tricks of political campaigning: a claque of t-shirted youths, mood music, staged applause and a promo video. Being Boris, happily, things soon went horribly wrong.

The event was held at County Hall, that marbled mausoleum across the Thames from Westminster. Commuters pouring out of Waterloo station could tell something was up because gaggles of spotty youths – public-schoolish types with Jacob Rees-Mogg accents and prominent Adam's apples – were loitering on the pavement wearing "Back Boris" logos and braying gently to one another across the morning breeze. Ah, the Young Conservative. Quite unmistakeable.

These sort of campaign launches are always made to look like public gatherings; but attendance was, as ever, by invitation only. The 200 or so people who turned up were a mixture of Tory activists, parliamentary candidates, think tank researchers, sceptical journalists and social acquaintances of the candidate who kissed one another on the cheeks and talked loudly about their foreign holidays. Boris's House of Commons secretary Frances Banks, who used to work for Charles Moore, turned up. So did Boris's biographer Andrew Gimson, who was there for the *Telegraph* and kept barking like a sea lion.

Hearty girls took names at trestle tables. The mood was faintly garden fête-ish, or perhaps morning cocktail party. Hacks, who are supposed to maintain a show of impartiality, were less than pleased to be told by these Boris-ettes that they had to wear stickers which said "Back Boris For A Greater London". "You won't be allowed in otherwise," chirruped one Sloane. Happily the stickers soon fell off jacket lapels and attached themselves to the soles of various scuffed brogues.

To the strains of Ralph McTell's "Streets of London" (pass the sick bag) attendees were shown into the GLC's old debating chamber, an absurdly plush affair with leather seats, pull-down wooden desks and high-domed lights. A stage manageress soon made sure there were no embarrassing gaps in the front rows, directing some of the t-shirted claque members to fill in any empty seats. One marvellously busty blonde in a tight Boris t-shirt sashayed to the front of the room. Up went a growl of male appreciation. *Carry On* star Lesley Phillips would have been in his element. Then a woman with ear phones and a microphone gave an airline-style security announcement about the emergency exits. "When does the drinks trolley come round?" cried one wit.

Boris's opponents have tried to put it about that he is some sort of foaming racist (a claim that is laughably untrue, by the way) so to counter this suggestion introductions were made by a black Tory from Lewisham, James Cleverly. He was given the job of announcing that a short film would be shown. Indeed it was – but the sound did not work. The screen showed figures walking at a speeded-up rate, and then Boris jabbering to the camera without making any noise. This gave everyone a glorious laugh.

Poor Boris. Here he was trying to show how grown-up and efficient he is, as slick as the "new" Labour election machine. Instead things were turning out like amateur film society evening. The unfortunate Cleverly had to climb back on the podium and say "er, we will re-run that – don't worry, this will all be edited out", which came as a surprise to the rolling news camera men who were there. Further sniggering from all sides.

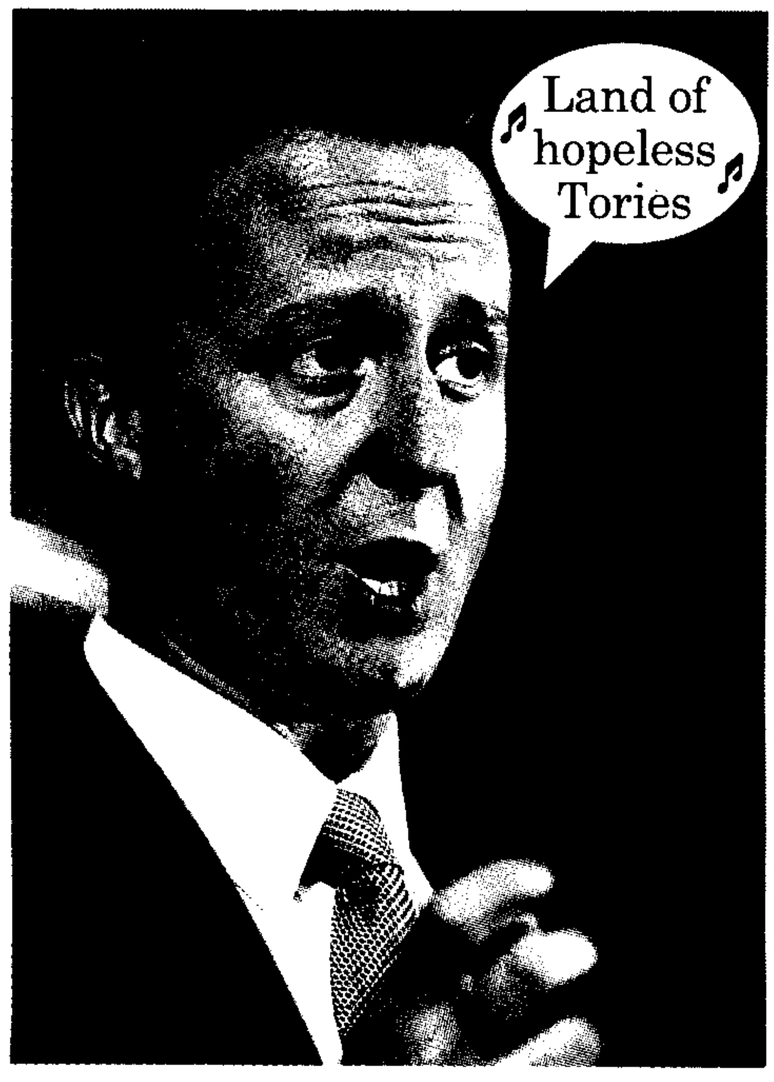
When the film finally decided to work there were loud, sarcastic cheers.

Boris finally turned up (mistiming his entrance cue) and it was obvious he was wearing a new suit. The shoulders were boxy, the sleeves too long, and unlike most of his other suits there were no food stains down the front. At first he tried to remember his lines and restrict himself to a few glances at a script on the lectern, but it did not last long. After a few balls-ups and oratorical fumbles he grabbed hold of his script and proceeded to deliver an Oxford Union style speech, waving his speech in the air like the young Palmerston.

There was no chance for questions at the end. Boris may be a journalist but he has plainly learned at least one rule of political life: never give the reptiles a chance to make you look stupid. With Boris there is no need. He does it handsomely by himself!

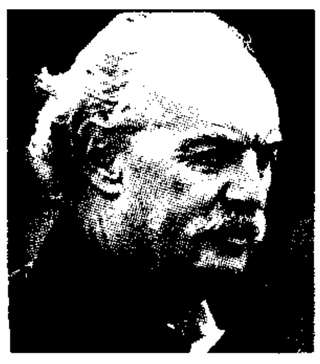
'Gavel Basher'

LAST NIGHT OF THE CONS



MAN IN THE EYE

DERMOT DESMOND



IF Gordon Brown wanted to draw a line under the embarrassing donation stories that marked the Tony Blair era, why has his party accepted cash from Dermot Desmond?

Mr Desmond, an Irish millionaire known as "the Kaiser", was one of the businessmen who secretly funded the extravagant lifestyle of Charles Haughey, the former Irish premier and chancer. Desmond also has business interests in Britain and owns Venson, a "vehicle management solutions" company, which managed to lumber London's police with a fleet of useless cars. Despite the track record Labour accepted a £34,375 donation from Venson in June, shortly after Blair's departure.

Making secret payments to the Irish prime minister wasn't illegal, of course; but the details of Desmond's cash-for-Haughey payments that emerged during the Moriarty Tribunal after Haughey's resignation were less than flattering.

The official inquiry into the Haughey millions that were provided by a number of businessmen said this of the Kaiser: "These were not isolated payments made in an open manner by Mr Desmond to Mr Haughey… On the contrary, they were shrouded in secrecy, and they were made from one off-shore account, through a series of off-shore accounts to what was, at least nominally, an off-shore account."

Much of the money went to Haughey after he left office, but the tribunal showed that Desmond spent around £75,000 refitting Haughey's yacht, Celtic Mist, while he was still prime minister. The Moriarty inquiry did not believe the money, which was greater than Haughey's salary as prime minister, was passed on as an act of friendship or generosity. Instead, it said it was "a reasonable inference that Mr Desmond's motive for making these payments was connected with the public office of Taoiseach [prime minister]."

The Moriarty revelations shocked Irish public opinion at the time, and one of Desmond's British business ventures is also fairly shocking.

In 1999 Venson took over the Met Police car fleet in a £53m PFI deal, buying the cars and leasing them back to the police. However, the Knackers soon suffered shortages and were forced to hire or borrow extra vehicles because Venson could not get the squad cars on the road. Worse, Scotland Yard experts raised "serious concerns about the safety of the Metropolitan Police fleet" and said that "safety is now being afforded less priority in the decision-making process than financial and 'political' considerations".

Cars were badly maintained – the brakes in some were potentially lethal – and all frontline vehicles were recalled. Venson eventually lost the Met deal, and £1m of Desmond's money in the process. Undeterred, the millionaire used the financial crisis to squeeze out other investors, assuming complete ownership in January.

FACT: Venson currently has PFI deals to supply vehicles to Nottingham police, Merseyside Fire Service and the East Anglia Ambulance Trust.

NUMBER CRUNCHING.....

£132m Yearly amount 'new' Labour cut from single parents' benefits in 1997

£134m Yearly amount 'new' Labour proposes to give all expectant mothers in the hope they will spend it on vegetables

Down on the Farm

NO SUBJECT has drawn more correspondence to this column recently than a satirical letter going the rounds, allegedly from a farmer writing to ask Defra how he can get into the business of receiving subsidies for not rearing pigs.

Hs friend, he says, has been making a good living out of the EU subsidies for not rearing pigs. He wants to know how many pigs Defra is prepared to pay him for not rearing likewise. From its popularity, many readers clearly find this bogus letter amusing, but the joke soon wears thin. For a start, it is a very old joke, first made famous in that best-selling American novel of 1961, Joseph Heller's *Catch-22*. The father of Major Major, the story's hero, was a farmer, "a God-fearing, freedom-loving, law-abiding, rugged individualist who held that federal aid to anyone but farmers was creeping socialism". His "speciality was alfalfa, and he made a good thing out of not growing any. The government paid him well for every bushel of alfalfa he did not grow. The more alfalfa he did not grow, the more money the government paid him." Fast forward to the present day, and one can see how someone who knows little about the workings of the latest farm subsidy system devised by the EU might imagine the satire still has some relevance. It is after all true that, under the EU's single farm payment scheme, a great many farmers are now paid not for producing anything, but simply for owning their land – which means, the more land they own, the more subsidies they get, even if they don't bother to grow anything. But at this point the joke rather falls down, its author's biggest error being to suggest that anyone might be subsidised for not growing pigs. One of the oddities about the EU's common agricultural policy is that, although it was long prepared to dish out colossal subsidies for producing almost every kind of foodstuff, for some strange reason the only types of farming which never received Brussels subsidies were keeping poultry and rearing pigs.

Farmers might for years have been paid to create those notorious grain, butter and beef mountains, floating in lakes of subsidised milk and wine. But the owners of chickens and rearers of pigs never received a penny. Even today, when the old system of subsidising food production has been replaced by the new practice of paying farmers simply for owning their land, the pig and poultry men still don't receive a single euro from the taxpayer. This was not the case before Britain joined the "Common Market" in 1973. Under the farm subsidy system introduced by the post-war Labour government in 1947, pig farmers and poultrymen got cash handouts just like all the rest. This only ceased when, in 1977, the UK's pig subsidies were declared illegal by the European Commission. When the commission's ruling was upheld by the European Court of Justice, Tony Benn, then a member of the cabinet, recorded in his diaries that this was the first time a policy of the British government, endorsed by parliament, had ever been ruled illegal by a court whose judgment the House of Commons could not alter. He described it as a "turning point" in the history of Britain's democracy. Thirty years later, it makes that supposedly satirical letter about pig farmers even less of a joke than its admirers realise.

'Muckspreader'

● NEGATIVE VETTING: A bizarre diktat from Animal Health (formerly known as the State Veterinary Service) has banned staff from taking their dogs to work.

Many vets used to take their dogs, for both safety and company, when out and about on farm visits; but they have now been told they must leave the animals at home in the interest of the dogs' welfare.

Around 300 vets and 1,000 field staff are affected by the ruling, which follows an incident in which one of the admin staff left a dog in a car in the staff car park. According to government scientists' union Prospect the vets weren't even consulted – either as employees or as experts in animal welfare.

The agency, which is part of the Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs, apparently doesn't trust its own vets on the simplest of animal welfare questions.

BRUSSELS SPROUTS

DISGRACED Ashley Mote, the former UKIP MEP who was jailed for nine months last week after a string of fraud convictions, can reflect from his prison cell that it is, more than ever, a fortunate thing to be British.

Mote will keep his parliamentary position and accompanying £60,000 salary because of a rule obliging resignation only for those sentenced to 12 months or more. But this is a *British* rule: MEP employment conditions are governed by whichever EU state they hail from. The European Parliament does not have the power to remove Mote's privileges.

Had Mote been French, say, his predicament would likely be much more serious. French National Front leader Jean-Marie le Pen was convicted in 1998 of assault and given a three-month suspended sentence. Under French rules he was also banned from political office and had to give up his European parliament seat.

A House of Commons spokesman told the *Eye* that MPs had no plans to discuss the Mote case and the wider issue of rules on misconduct when they return from recess in October.

Meanwhile, Mote's jailing has left his colleagues in the parliament's newest political group, the far-right Identity, Tradition, Sovereignty bloc, in a jam. Some of them want to kick Mote out, but this would reduce their number to 22, just above the 20-member threshold required for recognition and funding. Six ITS members are from Romania and must stand for election in November. Should they fail, the ITS may have to fold less than a year after its founding.

EU-phemisms

The Americans get to vote for their president. You have to put up with the one we give you

FOOT-IN-MOUTH

LAST week's *New Scientist* carried an intriguing job ad: the Institute for Animal Health is searching for a new "head of Pirbright animal services".

The successful candidate will "coordinate all activity in the UK's largest high containment animal facility, housing farm animals for studies on exotic viral diseases and zoonotic diseases…

"First and foremost, you will ensure effective performance and Health & Safety compliance," the ad continued. "You will make certain that we maintain tight biosecurity in everything we do."

Well, it's about time someone did. Two days after the magazine hit the streets, the Health and Safety Executive concluded that the IAH had been responsible for four separate breaches of biosecurity at its Pirbright laboratory complex, which was "highly likely" to have been the source of the recent foot and mouth outbreak in Surrey. As the advert terrifyingly announced: "The future of animal health is in our hands. And yours."

TV EYE

The Restaurant (BBC2)
Hell's Kitchen (ITV1)
Nigella Express (BBC2)

TELLY's meltdown over ethical standards has been particularly unfortunate for cookery shows because the genre essentially depends on misleading editing. Any viewers who put their food in the oven for the time that Nigella or Jamie or Delia keeps it there in the course of their half-hour shows would by now be dead from salmonella. Nor is it very likely that, in all cases, the money-shot of the food on the plate was necessarily actuality footage of how the dish looked at the moment when the chef took it from the pan or oven.

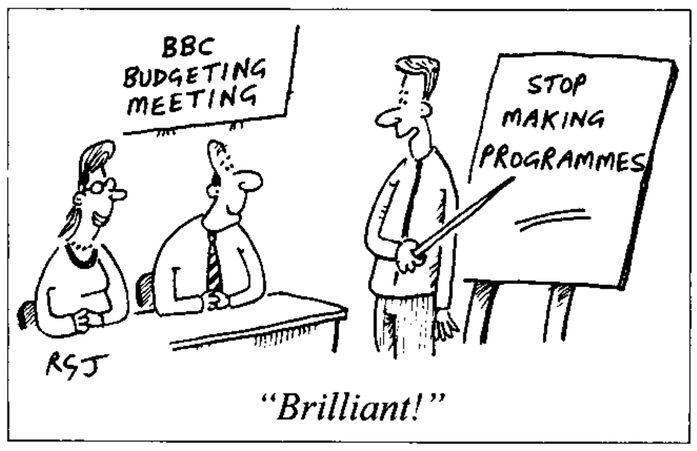
Sensible members of the audience probably understand this but, in the industry's present self-flagellating mood, every show has a lawyer standing behind it and all this needs to be spelled out.

So, even before it reached the air, **Nigella Express** had been subject to two flurries in media diaries. First, there was a rumour that the BBC Editorial Standards Unit, the new post-Hutton arse-watching department, had questioned the fact that, in a sequence in which the fragrant finger-licker cooks for her friends, all of those chums were white and middle-class. You imagine a sort of face-to-face version of Facebook, in which BBC researchers trawl the street-markets of Bethnal Green, asking shoppers if they are prepared to be Nigella's friend.

Next was the "revelation" that the kitchen in which Nigella is seen cooking is not, in fact, her home but a unit that she owns on an industrial estate. Well, heavens to Betsy. Next, they'll be telling us that Sean Connery and Roger Moore didn't drive all those cars off the cliffs.

It wouldn't take much audience research to find that the audience for Nigella's shows is middle-aged blokes who think she's hotter than their wives' stove and like it when she does that fellatio thing with her fingers after cleaning out the bowl. Anyone tuning in to a cookery show in the belief that it represents either social or televisual reality should be eating their meals in a jacket fastened at the front in a canteen in which all the sharp cutlery has been removed. Yet the medium's moral panic even extends to the recipes: much is made of the sequences in which old finger-licker does real-time cooking, throwing together a dish in the time it takes to watch her.

Over at ITV1, a channel where Mr Grade has actually sacked people for the phone-in fakeries, the nerves are even more apparent in **Hell's Kitchen**, where Angus Deayton is still doing front of house but Gordon Ramsay, who's too busy with Channel 4, has been replaced as resident chef overseeing the C-list would-be cooks (Jim Davidson, Paul Young, etc) by Marco-Pierre White.



"Brilliant!"

Angus didn't get many laughs out of the celebs in the first series but, in this one, he has even less chance because he has to keep reading out vast disclaimers about the voting phone-lines: "Calls received after that time will not be counted but may be charged."

Unfortunately, if this is reality TV on its best behaviour, you wouldn't like to see it when it wasn't. Despite everything that has happened on *Big Brother*, there was a racism row by the fourth night, with one of the contestants walking out over Marco-Pierre White's frequent use of the term "pikey".

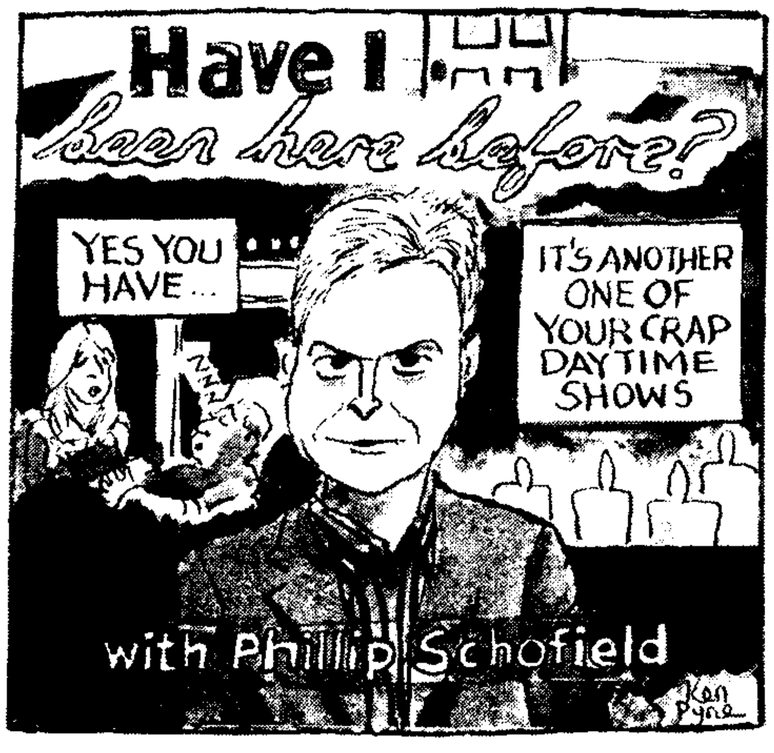
Also, the constant reassurances that potential contestants are carefully vetted and their welfare is always a priority were questioned by the fact that, when Rosie Boycott was voted off, Deayton handed her a glass of champagne and urged her to drink it. She didn't because, as everyone except the production team knows, she has written a book and many articles about being a recovering alcoholic.

BBC2's new reality cookery show, **The Restaurant**, is most at risk of being done for plagiarism. Right down to a soundtrack which should surely be called "variations on a theme from *The Apprentice*", this is a straight lift of the Sugar show, the only differences being that all rather than some of the challenges involve catering – nine couples run a restaurant, with one kicked out each week – and that the presiding businessman is not a snarling cockney but a gentle Frenchman who, perhaps blessedly, mangles the scripted eviction lines so horribly that the viewer can't hear them.

Presumably because it was in production for longer than *Nigella Express*, this series doesn't seem quite as squeaky-clean as most factual television these days. The editing clearly gives the impression that all the competing couples are cooking on the same evening, although it seems highly unlikely that the production would have run to nine different crews. The establishing shots showing the pairs standing in front of their restaurants also look like composites.

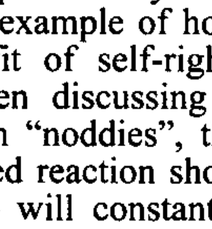
None of this particularly matters but it's an example of how TV's current fit of self-righteousness – even discussing a possible ban on "noddies", the separately-filmed reaction shots of presenters – will constantly invite a debate over why some editing and filming conventions remain acceptable while others don't. With each scandal, telly adds another layer of executive producers to every series but these three eating shows only prove that too many cooks spoil the broth.

'Remote Controller'



DUMB BRITAIN

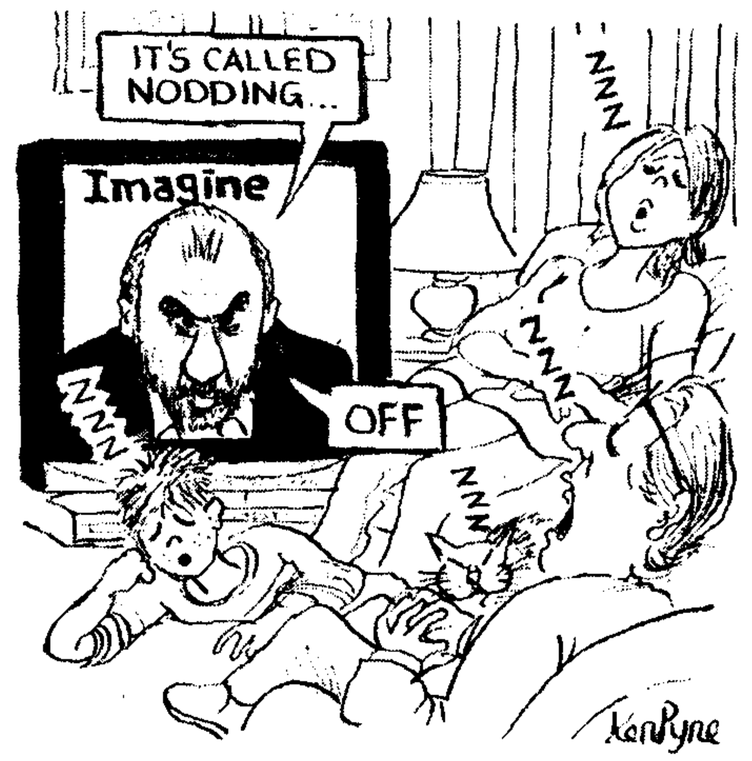
The Weakest Link, BBC2



Anne Robinson: Which African country gives its name to the complaint known as "gyppy tummy"?
Contestant: Venezuela.
AR: "Cornish" describes something as being from with English county?
Contestant: Devon.

The Big Ask, LBC

Gary King: What is the largest carnivore that lives on the land?
Caller: A whale.
King: Who sang the theme tune to the James Bond film *Goldfinger*?
Caller: Shirley Temple.



AD NAUSEAM

AFTER news last issue that Labour is hunting for an election ad agency, it comes as little surprise that the Tories have followed suit. The process will be managed by communications director Andy Coulson and Steve Hilton, Cameron's Mandelsonesque *éminence grise*.

Hilton certainly has form. When the Tories were routed in 1997 it was Hilton, then working at M&C Saatchi, who pulled the strings behind the infamous Demon Eyes ads – a campaign that prompted sustained back-slapping in adland but backfired when voters proved wholly uninterested in personal attacks.

After the election Hilton wrote a chapter titled, "The Conservative Party's Advertising Strategy", in the book *Political Communications: Why Labour won the General Election in 1997*, and with another campaign in the offing it makes for interesting reading. Getting the Tories re-elected was, he wrote, "the ideal task for advertising image-makers: it was political image that needed changing, not the facts". Hilton and his wonks, it must be concluded, failed to change that image and the Tories got a hiding.

So, he asks: "What lessons can we draw from the experience?" Ignoring the obvious one – don't hire Steve Hilton – he blames the debacle, inevitably, on "events". "When unplanned events come to dominate, political advertising struggles to be heard... Think of the advertising expenditure needed to balance the front and inside pages of every daily newspaper over a 14-month period... advertising cannot work as well when it is fighting the news agenda as when it is leading it."

So how on earth do you get advertising to lead the news agenda? Simple: hire the editor of the *News of the World* as your communications chief!

PS: If the Conservatives' latest campaign is anything to go by, their advertising certainly needs a shake-up. In true Cameroonian style there's a presentational gimmick – it is run entirely online – but little else is new. If the slogan "It's Time For Change" seems familiar, it is not just because it's a hackneyed political platitude: "It's Time," was the Scottish National Party's slogan for its election campaign in May.

O·B·N

... it is easy to see why Kate Moss adores him [Pete Doherty]. He's clever, elusive, ethereal, barely there; like the poet Shelley, he is an ineffectual angel simply passing through while making the rest of his rock-band ilk look like a bunch of bankers.

FRANCES WILSON
Seven magazine, ST

Submitted by J. James

MEDIA NEWS

SPARE a thought for BBC Scotland, who had to credit BBC Northern Ireland as one of its outside broadcast providers for the Edinburgh Military Tattoo.

BBC Scotland's own OB facilities have been cut back so hard it no longer has the capacity to cover such big events and is forced to rely on "external parties" from the independent sector to make up the shortfall.

Sensing BBC Scotland's reliance on their services, independent companies have pushed up their prices so much that it is actually cheaper for the BBC to ship one of its own units, including cameras and crew, over from Belfast and put them up in an Edinburgh hotel.

BACK in June the *Sun* led the onslaught against Channel 4 for broadcasting photos of Princess Diana's fatal car crash.

"Di Film Fury" it thundered, while its royal snapper Arthur Edwards accused C4 of insensitivity to the feelings of Princes William and Harry. "Why should they suffer the torment of having pictures of their mother dying broadcast to the world?"

On 31 August, another British channel broadcast pictures of Diana in her death throes in the Mercedes. A spokesman for William and Harry protested at the "distressing" images, as did many viewers. Yet there was no mention of the incident in the *Sun*, let alone any outraged editorials or blasts from Arthur Edwards. But then the TV channel in question was… Sky News.

GIVEN the controversy over Christine Ohuruogu's World Championships 400m gold medal – which followed her suspension for missing three drugs tests – BBC commentator Steve Cram could have chosen his words a little more carefully.

Within seconds of Ohuruogu crossing the line in a personal best time, Cram told viewers in best Colemanballs style that her victory was "a shot in the arm for British athletics". Quite.

By the time he wrote his column for the following day's *Guardian*, however, Cram had clearly thought better of his choice of cliché and this time called it "just the fillip that British athletics needs".

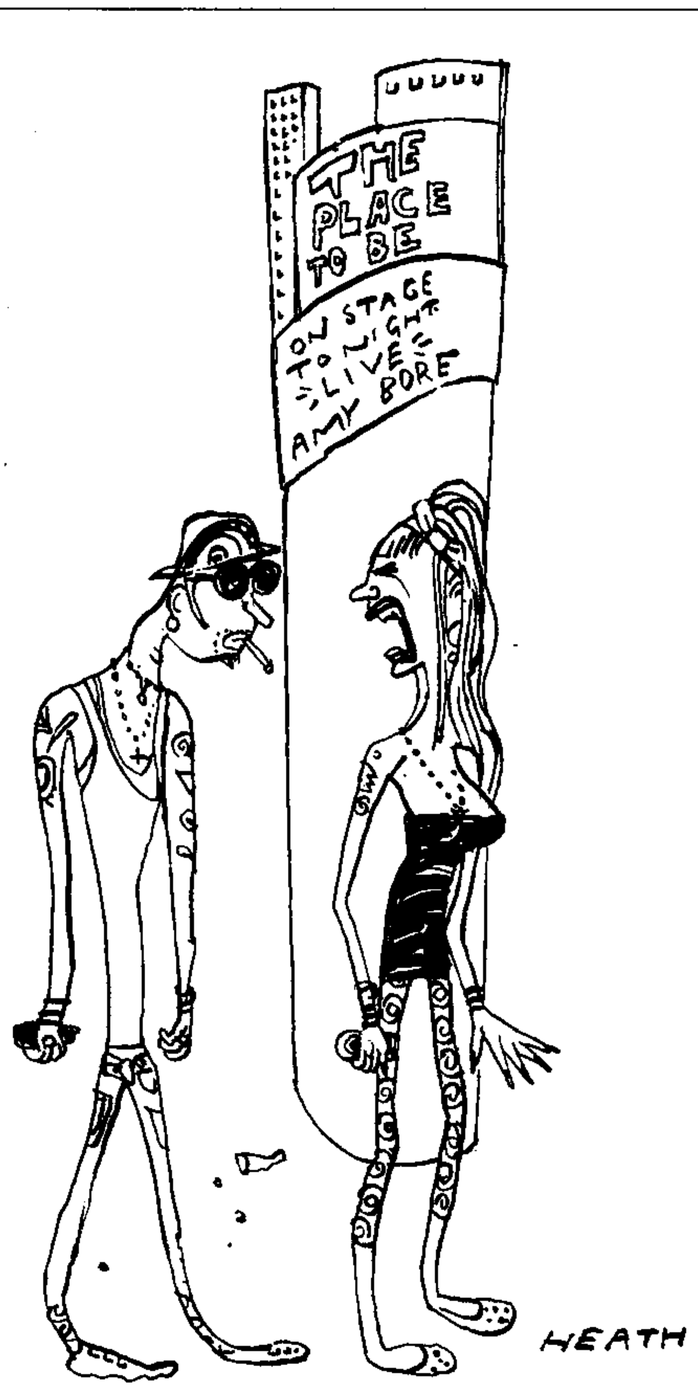
THE BBC was quick to defend Nigella Lawson over allegations in the *Daily Mail* that she was guilty of "Waitrose product placement" in her new food porn show. "Nigella does not have a contract with any British supermarket," sniffed a BBC spokesperson.

But she does have a contract with John Lewis, the partnership that owns Waitrose. And at John Lewis you can purchase a "Nigella Lawson Bread Bin" in beech or cream, "Nigella Lawson Measuring Cups", a "Nigella Lawson Whisk", or indeed any of her range of measuring spoons, storage jars, mixing bowls, butter dish and utensils. Many of these items are to be found in her TV kitchen.

ONCE we relied on high court judges to display how out of touch they were by saying things like "what is The Beatles?" Now we have judges in reality TV competitions.

The new series of *The X Factor* showed a supermarket worker from the south-west auditioning for Simon Cowell's moneyspinner. The long-haired fellow explained that he was desperate to escape the drudgery of his job. And what was that? "I work at Morrison's," he said, referring to Britain's fourth biggest grocers.

The audition went badly and the poor wretch was soon on his way, back to his life of toil. As the door closed judge Sharon Osbourne could be heard whispering: "What's Morrison's?"



"What do you mean, she's no good? She's been in rehab, she tried to kill herself, she's also into self harming..."

DUMB ITV

"THE effects of global climate change can be seen on a new atlas that shows shrinking lakes and rising sea levels," ITV news announced on 3 September, before cutting to a jolly little package in which science reporter Lawrence McGinty stood in Lake Chad to demonstrate its shallowness before cutting to a snap taken from the skies of Central Asia.

"This was the Aral Sea in Asia in the 1960s," he told viewers. "A satellite picture shows the fourth biggest lake in the world. Now it's almost split in two, and the atlases have to be redrawn more and more often." The pictures were juxtaposed with images of melting ice in the Arctic, just in case viewers failed to get the message.

Perhaps McGinty should have a word with the UN Environment Programme, which, as every geography student knows, is under the impression that the Aral Sea's "problems began in the 1960s and 1970s with the diversion of the main rivers that feed it to provide for cotton cultivation in arid Soviet Central Asia". Manmade environmental disaster it certainly is – but global warming it ain't.

O·B·N

Sharon is so multi-faceted; she is a mum, a manager and has survived this industry and created new things like *The Osbournes* on MTV, which nobody had done before.

I've always loved strong women I can look up to and admire, they are the only ones I get along with and Sharon is certainly one of them. I'm in awe of what she does.

DANNII MINOGUE
on Sharon Osbourne
Daily Express magazine

Submitted by Francis Harvey

£10 paid for entries put forward for the Order of the Brown Nose.

HOW TELEVISION WORKS

IN February ITV1 viewers were treated to *The Truth About Size Zero*, made by Queen-fakers RDF, in which former pop star Louise Redknapp undertook "extreme dieting" under the close watch of nutritionists to demonstrate the health risks of overslimming.

In April, it was Channel 4's turn for what the channel called "an experiment to explore why women obsess about diets, food and their weight", with journalists Kate Spicer and Louise Burke starving themselves for *Superskinny Me: The Race to Size Double Zero.* The one-off show was made by production company Betty, which was quick to assure concerned viewers that the pair were "supervised by a specialist medical team" at all times.

Last week one Alex Ward from *Big Brother* producers Endemol emailed a number of journalists asking for their help with "a new 8x1 hour series for a prime time slot on Channel 4. I am looking for a female journalist, up to 30 years old, who would be willing to experiment in 8 to 10 extreme diets. We would like the journalist to investigate the 'fad' diets, and what they do to you."

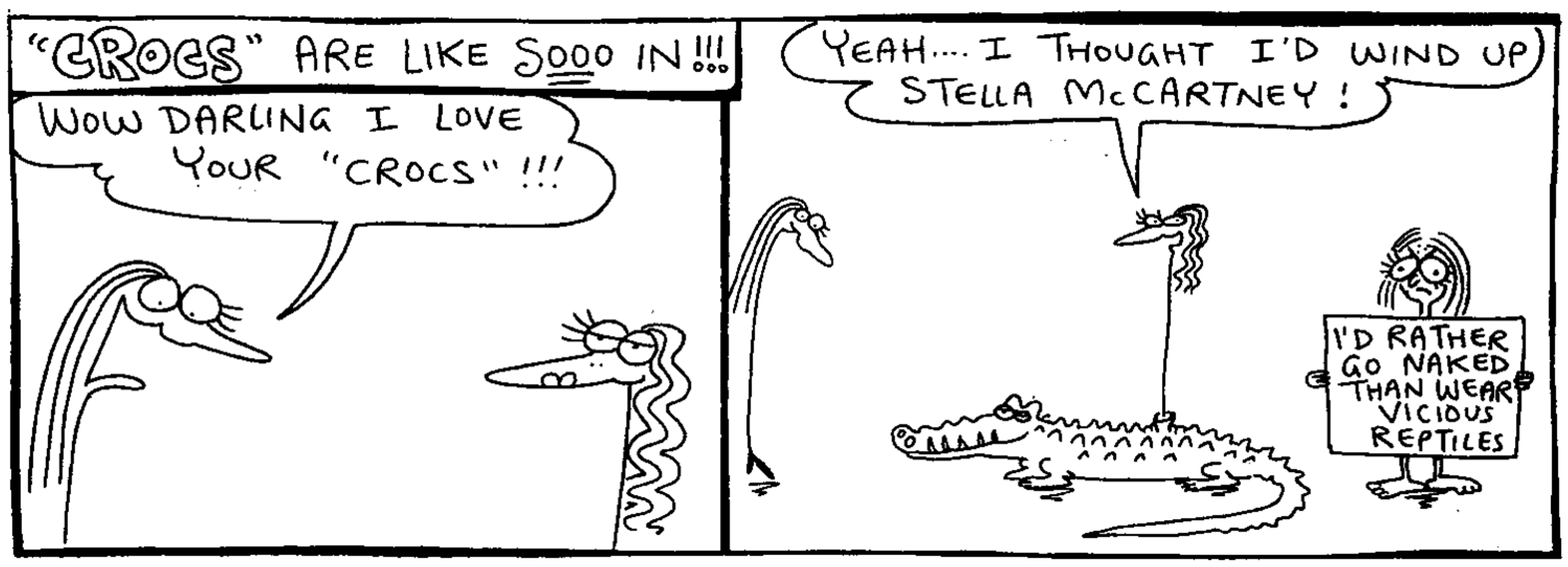
Lest anyone be concerned about the health implications for the hungry hack, Ward had reassuring news. "We are also looking for a young (ish) good looking doctor, male or female."

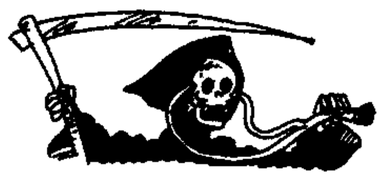
Drawing from such real-life examples as Miss Marple and fictional characters such as Boris Johnson, Marr paints a wonderfully entertaining picture that can only obscure as much as it reveals.

The Times

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


"CROCS" ARE LIKE SOOO IN!!!
WOW DARLING I LOVE YOUR "CROCS"!!!
YEAH.... I THOUGHT I'D WIND UP STELLA McCARTNEY!
I'D RATHER GO NAKED THAN WEAR VICIOUS REPTILES



MEDICINEBALLS

Winners and losers

THE legacy of Tony Blair's market reforms of the NHS was bound to create winners and losers, and Gordon Brown has to decide what to do with them.

The winners, unsurprisingly, are foundation trusts, the government's flagship hospitals, which were given unfair market advantages over their competitors and have managed to squirrel away £1bn, nearly 10 percent of their turnover. That this money should be lying idle in a year of draconian staff and service cuts is, according to the regulatory authority Monitor, because foundations don't know what to do with it.

"Lack of clarity from primary care trusts [PCTs] and strategic health authorities about what they want to pay for and uncertainty over how services will look once the reconfiguration of hospitals is complete, is making foundation trusts reluctant to invest their surpluses."

Alas, for Brown to win public or professional support for reconfiguration he has to have replacement services in place before he closes down, or downsizes, hospitals. Foundation trusts are the only hospitals left with money to provide the extra capacity for, say, closed A&E departments and maternity units. They aren't doing so because they don't know whether to expand their existing units or build polyclinics in the community or jump into bed with the private sector.

In the current climate the biggest sin is to go back into debt and a lot of money has already been wasted on plans for new PFI projects and independent sector treatment centres (ISTCs) that have now been axed over concerns about their viability. If we can't pay for the hospitals we already have, why build more?

Less fortunate trusts, meanwhile, are staring down the barrel of £911m in debt, and are being forced to attempt the politically impossible: trying to convince staff and public of service closures without having the money to reinvest in improved services until they close.

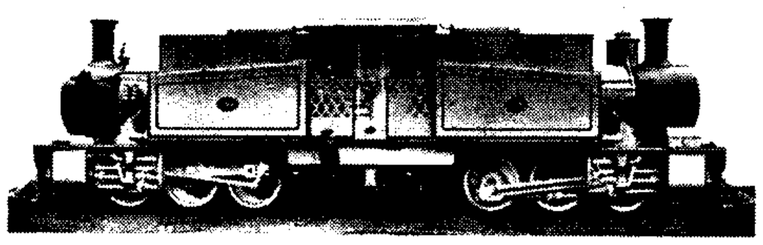
For example, West Herts Hospitals NHS Trust has decided to close all the acute services, including the accident and emergency unit, at Hemel Hempstead hospital with patients travelling to Watford General hospital instead. But the trust is still heavily in debt and plans to cut the staff in the A&E unit in Watford as well, which may put patients at risk even before the influx from Hemel. Watford's buildings are crumbling, the power supply needs replacing and it is already overcrowded, with new buildings now planned not likely to open until 2013. Small wonder the public are unconvinced.

There is a very uneven distribution of hospitals in England, with 7 percent of the population (in rural areas) unable to access a hospital in 30 minutes by road and 10 percent able to access 10 or more in that time. Those unable to attract enough custom may have to, in "new" Labour parlance, "exit the emerging healthcare market"; but Brown will be keen not to have blood on his hands. Blair's hope was that "commissioners" would take the rap for service closures. If they aren't buying the services, the hospitals can't stay open. But commissioning has been the biggest failure of Labour's reforms, hence the panic reconfiguration of PCTs and talk of outsourcing £64bn worth of commissioning to American firms such as such as United Health and Kaiser.

"Mr Morrison, I'm not going to take any chances. Your test appears to show you to be one of the undead"

Brown would prefer to keep the money closer to home, and is desperate for GPs to take up the mantel of Practice-Based Commissioning. As with Tory fund-holding, large consortia of commercially-minded GPs will be given leeway to commission services from community polyclinics in which they have a financial stake. In return, they will take the blame and anger if the business they take away from district general hospitals (DGHs) results in their closure. DGHs have survived for so long because their debts were hidden or redistributed, and no one was able to come up with a better model. If Brown allows hospitals to close and manages to blame GPs for it, he truly will be Blair's successor.

M.D.



SIGNAL FAILURES

Full tilt

TRANSPORT hacks who rode the first train over the complete Chunnel rail link were reminded of the British way of raising train speeds later the same day at the launch of Network Rail's report on the Cumbria derailment.

The Chunnel link is the London branch of France's high-speed TGV network (copied by most other west European countries). The Treasury abhors building new railways to cut congestion and journey times and insists Victorian railways are adequate; but it was the push to accelerate London-Glasgow services without building new tracks that led to the fatal Grayrigg accident in February, NR's report reveals.

Pendolino trains can travel 12 or 14 percent faster – the "enhanced permissible speed" (EPS) – than other trains on 1840s infrastructure because they tilt on bends. NR's investigation concluded that the higher speed may have put the Grayrigg points, which broke as the train passed, under different stresses "tending towards fatigue failures".

One secondary effect of EPS was to cut the time available for track inspection. Faster trains ended the established practice of workers going on to open tracks, with lookouts to alert them as trains approached. Inspections were limited to when the tracks were closed, an "intensive period of activity each Sunday morning". That "stretched" available resources and relied on workers volunteering for overtime. Managers and supervisors thought "the move to EPS had been forced upon them without their concerns regarding access being addressed in a timely fashion". They reluctantly accepted a new inspections regime as a temporary arrangement. Staff improvised and broke rules to carry out inspections in the reduced time available, but one manager said he didn't do a risk assessment because the regime was only short-term.

The accident wasn't an inevitable result of tilting trains going faster: extra staff could have compensated for the reduced inspections time, and the points should have been maintained properly. But the report implies that NR agreed to EPS without appreciating its implications and ensuring the maintenance regime was sufficiently robust and resourced.

Meanwhile the government and Virgin Trains aim to get more from the infrastructure with extra services from December 2008. NR's report says that will reduce the time available for track inspections still further.

PS: If shaving minutes off journeys justifies reduced track-inspection time and the expense of tilting train technology, why does Virgin add so many minutes to the last legs of journeys? For instance, Virgin allows trains 31 minutes from Euston to Milton Keynes (the first leg of longer journeys) while allowing trains from Milton Keynes to Euston terminus about 37 to 40 minutes. Punctuality is officially measured by arrival at final stations, but surely Virgin wouldn't squander such hard-won minutes on making its statistics look better?

NR's report is remarkably candid after the Railtrack era, when safety problems were hushed up to keep the share price aloft. But NR's candour has its limits. The report details malpractices by local employees but offers no clues to who higher up in NR should have spotted what was going on.

The accident resulted from systematic failures, not a one-off oversight. The report says some workers still follow the "organisation chart" of the previous Railtrack contractor because they "have chosen not to sign new job descriptions" but doesn't explain why NR didn't address that rebelliousness.

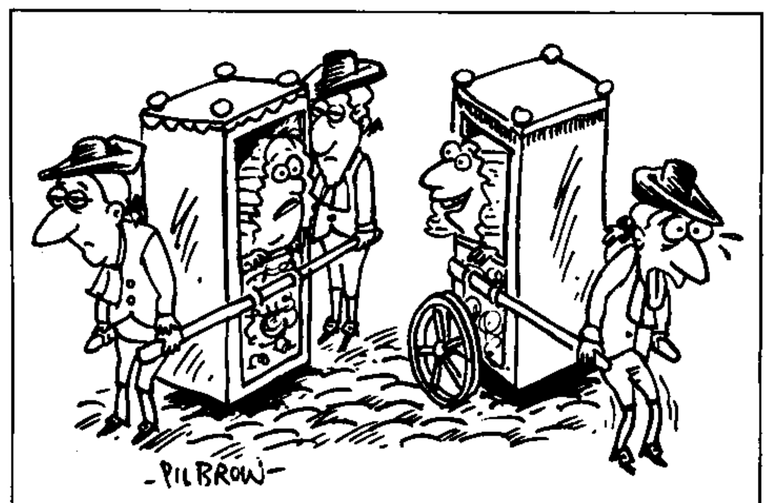
NR highlights the poor relationship between local managers and supervisors but ignores the relationship between local and national managers. "The intended short-term solution to inspection and patrolling has migrated into an extended period," says the report, without considering why.

It's just as well the report doesn't point a finger at senior figures. NR directors still haven't had their 2006-7 bonuses, £286,000, which they grudgingly agreed to defer while investigators pinned the blame for Grayrigg on the bottom of the hierarchy (*shurely "established why the accident happened"? Ed*).

AN innovation on Manchester's Metrolink trams flies in the face of modern Britain's public service ethos. Fares on the Altrincham line are actually being temporarily *reduced* in recognition of passengers' disrupted journeys as tracks are modernised.

Metrolink is overseen by an accountable transport authority. The national rail network, thanks to Labour's efforts, is divorced from democracy: contractors are paid by taxpayers and passengers so the government can blame them for the unpopular outcomes of its rail policies. Engineering work has been a handy excuse for train firms to withhold discounted book-ahead tickets, forcing passengers to pay full price *and* suffer replacement buses. And any excuse will do. South West Trains told staff to extract the premium "via London" fare from passengers forced to go through London because of the floods in July.

'Dr B Ching'



"I've halved my carbon emissions"

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

GONE TO POT

SOCIAL CLEANSING continues in Salford, where the city council is pressing ahead with its mission of "clearance or demolition of unpopular and out of date housing" under the Prezza-begotten "Pathfinder" scheme to bulldoze, sorry, transform northern cities.

Curiously, most of the "unpopular" terraced homes in need of demolition seem to be in strategic locations where developers anticipate handsome profits. In Seedley, a tram stop from the BBC's new home at mediacity:uk [*sic*], the council commissioned consultants TPAS (Tenant Participation Advisory Service) to canvass residents' views. The report concluded: "There is a very strong and seemingly overwhelming opposition to demolition and a real desire to keep the community together." Pretty clear, one might think.

The council responded by ignoring the report and announcing a "new set of proposals" to demolish 52 houses. A residents' plan which would have saved them was dismissed because it had no "wow factor".

Across the road is Chimney Pot Park, where trendy developer Urban Splash (US) created its celebrated "iconic" development of "upside down" terraced houses – with the bedrooms downstairs and the living area above – with the aid of £20m in public money. US chairman Tom Bloxham, a friend of local MP Hazel Blears, originally promised "affordable" houses for around £50,000. The average price of a 2nd phase house is around £140,000 – a fortune to former residents.

Some are now looking for a good lawyer to help take Salford council to court. They were told their homes were to be demolished, were paid inadequate sums in compensation and then were horrified to discover that the houses weren't being knocked down after all. Hundreds were reborn as deluxe Urban Splash "terraces" and flogged at market rates. Former residents caught out this way were never offered the right to return, and some, including many pensioners, have had to take out substantial loans from the council, albeit interest-free, in order to afford new homes elsewhere. Fewer than 10 percent of the original population now live in Chimney Pot Park. Isn't regeneration wonderful?

DIRTY DOC

HARD on the heels of Rotten Boroughs' stories about Karl Lindon, the Southwark Lib-Dem council candidate jailed for paedo-porn offences (*Eye*s 1187 and 1188), we learn of another Lib-Dem candidate with a colourful past.

Former consultant psychiatrist "Dr" John Harding Price has twice fought local elections in Lincoln as an official party candidate in the past two years, for the county and city councils, despite having been struck off the medical register in 2000 for inappropriate behaviour with female patients and being deemed "a risk to the public" by the GMC.

The dirty doc has not so far been elected, but this has not diminished his enthusiasm for public service. Harding Price, 77, is currently one of two candidates to become a governor of Lincolnshire Partnership NHS foundation trust, overseeing the running of psychiatric care services across the county. Regarding his council candidature, Charles Shaw, chairman of Lincoln Lib Dems, says: "Has he been convicted of any offence? If not, he is entitled to stand." Good to see the Ming-ers taking such a firm moral position!

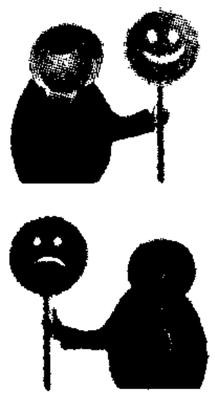
VALE OF TEARS

EMBARRASSING cashflow problems at Vale of White Horse district council in Oxfordshire. Last month the Lib Dem authority's 300-strong workforce did not get paid. Much, much worse, the Vale's 51 councillors did not receive their allowances on time.

The council's electricity supplier threatened to sue for non-payment of bills, village halls refused to take bookings from the council because they feared they wouldn't get their money and the Land Registry turned down search requests for the same reason. Yet the Vale, around Abingdon, is a prosperous area, the council boasts of setting the eighth lowest council tax in England and is proud of its "substantial" financial and property investments. It's all very odd.

Well, perhaps not. The problems only began after the council signed a seven-year, £9.1m deal to "outsource" financial services last year… with Crapita plc.

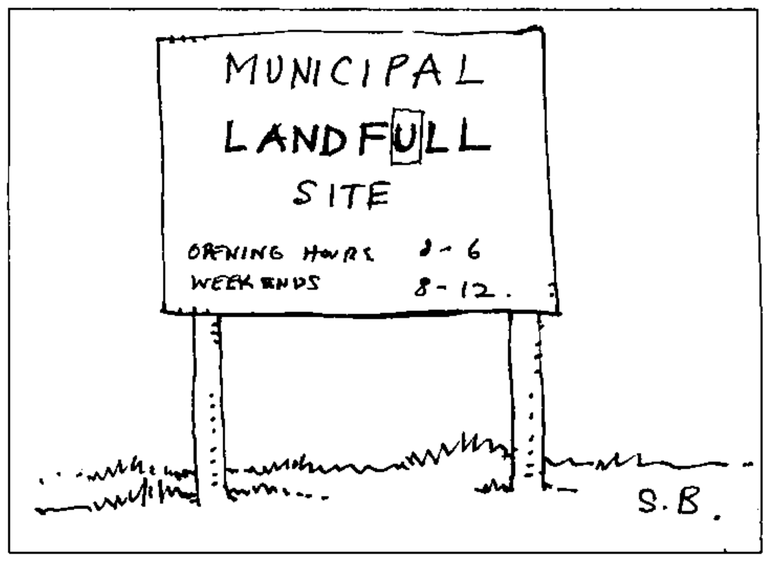
● NOTHING like a bit of PCGM ("political correctness gone mad"). The little cartoon characters on the left featured on a postcard issued by Bromsgrove district council in the Midlands which asked residents, inanely, if they were "glad or grumpy". Four figures, male and female, black and white, held little balloons variously featuring "sad" or "smiley" faces.



But Labour councillors noticed that the "saddest" balloon was held by a black character. Racist stereotyping alert! The cards have duly been reprinted (right) so that the black chap now has a happy-faced balloon and his white chum has a sad one. And so racial harmony prevails in Bromsgrove again.

FINN STUFF

SUNDERLAND'S former director of housing, Peter Walls, was arrested on 31 August over a claim that he made threats to kill local property developer John Finn. Finn said Walls had shouted threats at him after spotting him walking near Walls's home in the village of Newbottle on 31 July.



Walls, who is chief executive of the Gentoo housing association, formerly Sunderland Housing Group (*Eyes passim*), strenuously denies the allegation. He believes Finn is one of the people behind a critical website, Dadsplace, which he succeeded in having shut down last year.

Walls is now believed to have spent more than £1m of tenants' money pursuing legal actions against SHG/Gentoo's critics. A Northumbria police spokesman said: "A man has been arrested on suspicion of making threats to kill and released on bail pending further inquiries."

PENGUIN NEWS

WHEN Michael Blanch left his job as chief executive of Bromley council in January 2000, he used his farewell speech to smear as "eco-thugs" the members of a peaceful campaign to stop the council concreting over 12 acres of Crystal Palace park for a 20-screen cinema and car park (*Eye* 994).

Blanch was off to be chief executive of the Falkland Islands Government (FIG), which at the time was engaged in persecuting a local conservationist, Mike Bingham, who had drawn attention to a dramatic decline in penguin stocks as a result of over-fishing. "Evidently the kelpers share Dr Blanch's distaste for environmentalists," noted the *Eye*. "He should feel at home there."

And so it turned out. After Blanch's arrival in the Falklands the campaign against Bingham continued, culminating in the environmentalist fleeing the islands for a quieter life in, er, Argentina (*Eye* 1104).

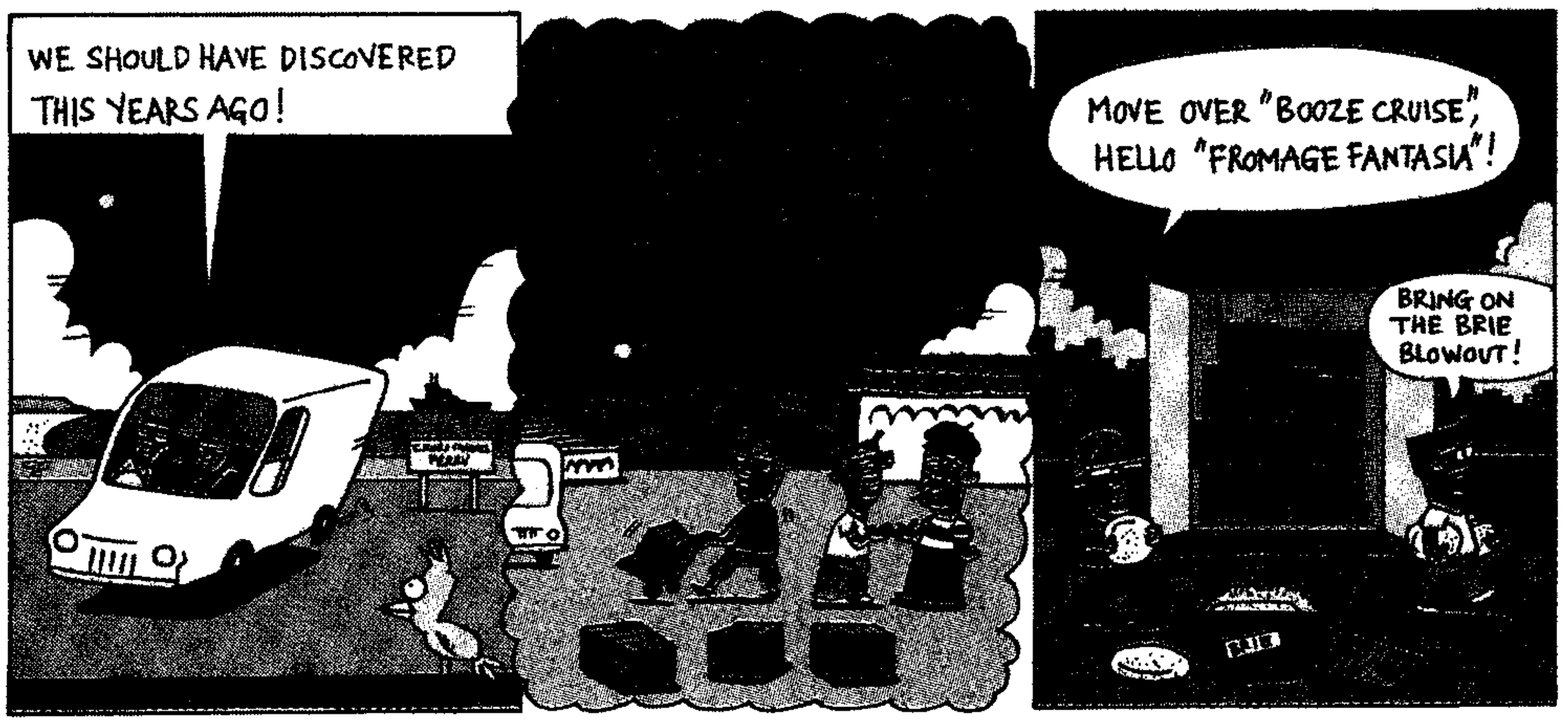
In November 2003, the Falklands supreme court ruled that Blanch and other Falklands bigwigs had behaved in an illegal manner for improper motives. Chief Justice James Wood described their abuse of Bingham's human rights as "morally and constitutionally indefensible". By the time of the ruling, however, Blanch had left the Falklands and was working as a consultant reporting on ways of "transforming" Swansea council to its chief executive, Tim Thorogood, who himself had lived on the Falklands in his youth.

Last year Thorogood resigned as chief executive of Swansea after a scandal about how he managed to get planning permission at his home on the Gower peninsula for a "garage" that looked uncannily like a luxury bungalow (*Eye* 1152). Dr Blanch, meanwhile, quietly returned to the Falklands this summer, following the departure of yet another chief executive, to act as interim chief exec until a permanent replacement could be found. The vacancy is now filled. Tim Thorogood takes over in January. Small world, isn't it?

● SOUR GRAPES in the London borough of Waltham Forest, where the council pulled out of promoting last week's Walthamstow Art Trail after organisers included a "Loakes & Co Trail of Destruction", a guided walk to highlight council leader Clyde Loakes's role in running down arts provision in the borough – in particular curtailing hours at the internationally famous William Morris museum (*Eye* 1178). Happily the council still feels able to promote its own David Beckham Trail, which celebrates the borough's other distinguished son.

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

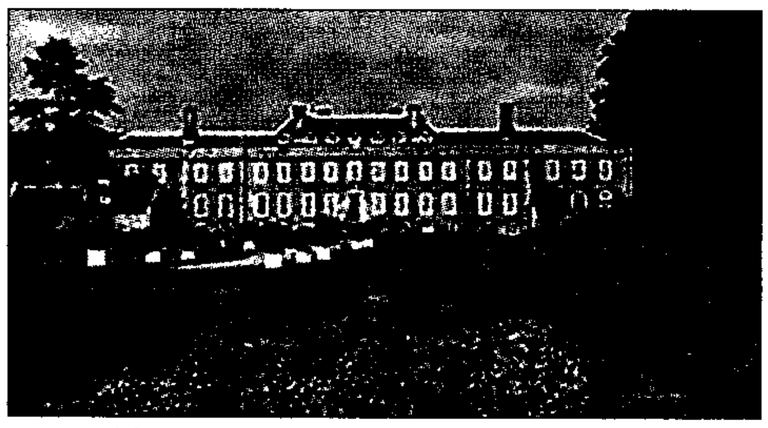


NOOKS and CORNERS

WHEN Philip Yorke, the last squire of Erddig, left his house to the National Trust in 1973, it was one of the most generous gifts ever made to the trust.

Yorke not only gave a great Georgian house and its wooded park to be enjoyed by a wider public; he also left some 2,000 acres of land near Wrexham in Flintshire. Sixty-three acres of this were sold for almost £1m to provide an endowment, while compensation from the National Coal Board for mining subsidence under the property brought in £120,000 for repairs and restoration. Yorke had inherited the estate in 1966 and devoted his last years to securing its future. Erddig opened to the public in 1977 and he died the following year.

Erddig is not just handsome architecture; it is very special because the Yorke family threw little



or nothing away and resisted the arrival of electricity, gas and mains water until well into the 20th century. It is also remarkable for the wealth of portraits of servants as well as members of the family preserved in the house. Because it is a unique family home, fully preserved, it has always been popular and, by one estimate, is the favourite "stately home" in Britain after Chatsworth, attracting about 350,000 visitors a year.

So it's surprising the trust claims the endowment at Erddig was insufficient to maintain the place and that, to deal with a £15m deficit, it wants to sell another 20 acres next to the village of Rhostyllen for a housing development. What may or may not be surprising are the tactics the trust is using to achieve this potentially lucrative development.

The trust soon fell out with Philip Yorke, who only agreed to the initial sale of land reluctantly. He left the land to the trust in perpetuity "for the benefit of local people" and did not want any more land to be built on. Locals recall a signed document by Squire Yorke stating as much, but the trust seems unable to find it.

Originally the National Trust proposed to build 140 houses – and no blocks of flats – next to Rhostyllen in "an exemplary development of sustainable new homes, which will integrate with the surrounding environment". But the application suddenly increased to 223 dwellings – including 68 flats; 55 of which (some 25 percent) will be affordable housing to be built in partnership with Cymdeithas Tai Clwyd. Locals feel the scale of the development grossly exceeds local needs; and nor are they impressed by the trust's claim to have conducted "consultations" rather than presentations.

Some tenants who are obstacles to the development have had their tenancies abruptly terminated. One, who ran Hafod Farm as a riding school for 30 years, complained of "underhand" behaviour after the lease was not renewed. It emerged that this was so the buildings could be let to another farmer whose land had had to be purchased by the trust for the proposed development.

What is clear is that the National Trust is trying to cash in on the housing boom around Wrexham and the houses will be bought by people who will commute from north-west England, so creating a social divide. Indeed, locals have been infuriated by an advertisement for the houses "coming soon" issued by the developers – the *Eye*'s old friends Countryside Properties, of Brentwood, Essex – even though planning permission has yet to be granted by Wrexham borough council. To add insult to injury, it was stated that Rhostyllen was in comfortable, wealthy, smug *Cheshire* when it is in fact in Flint and in Wales. No wonder the trust now faces strenuous opposition from the local community group, Cymuned.

Before the National Trust became so patrician and so involved with aristocratic country seats, it was primarily concerned with protecting landscape from development. It cannot be healthy now to have a local community campaigning under the slogan "Don't Trust the National Trust". But the trust's ethos is now determined in a modern office block in Swindon where the expensive and high-powered chief executive Fiona Reynolds presides over endless restructurings and management plans (*Eyes passim*). The real question is: how did an estate whose gift was described by James Lees-Milne as "one of the most splendid acts of generosity in all the years I have been associated with the National Trust" come to be run at a loss? Where did the money go?

OH DEAR: the joys of Schadenfreude! South Lakeland district council has announced that the £3m-plus Berners Pool in Grange-over-Sands will probably now be demolished as it cannot afford to run it and no suitable bid has come in to take over the exciting but useless new building (Eye 1181).

It was designed by Hodder Associates, also responsible for the exciting Clissold Pool in Hackney which also had to close soon after opening (Eye 1114). Hackney council claims this latter facility will reopen next year: we shall see. Meanwhile, well-designed but old and poorly maintained swimming pools all over Britain are closing because local authorities claim they cannot afford to run them. Yet crazy sums of money are being poured into the Olympics – whose facilities might one day benefit the people of Hackney but will not be of the slightest use to Grange-over-Sands or anywhere else.

'Piloti'

I-SPY *Derby*

Submitted by Geoff Wicks. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs)*

"I wondered if you'd ever thought of re-forming the old band?"

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

THE final curtain for Fat Lucy, as his intimates once called him (though not, I think, to his face), was something to touch even this column's heart. Pavarotti was probably the greatest male voice of modern times, a giant personality, and his 40-year career gave him that Queen-Motherly sense of having been with us always. He'll be missed.

But the hypocrisy of those who've been paying him tribute is something else. Not long ago they were gloating over his dodgy tax affairs, his sexual infidelities, his greed, his unreliability… and there's no denying that FL (worse still, his entourage) could be extremely difficult.

In later years, when the fabulous dimension of the voice grew less dependable, he got lazy. When he didn't feel like singing, he cancelled – producing what Sir John Tooley, the former general director of Covent Garden, called the most bizarre doctor's certificates he'd ever seen. Opera houses like the Garden decided they could do without him.

His capriciousness caused havoc. One under-reported example was the 90th birthday concert for Gian Carlo Menotti, the Italian composer who died this year. It was a grand event, playing to an open-air audience of thousands and with FL as the star turn. But little did the thousands know that until that morning, FL had been threatening not to come because the name of some young soprano (his "protégée") had been accidentally left off the posters. He had only agreed to sing if she sang too. She was in a huff, so he too went into a huff.

By lunchtime, after pleading phone calls, FL was appeased and duly turned up – to give a TV press conference at which he told the cameras that Menotti was his oldest and dearest friend and how it was the most important thing in the world to be here for this great birthday, etc. All complete tosh, but enough to soothe those concerned.

Then, in the course of the concert, some other trifle caused FL offence with the result that during the interval he got into a waiting car and drove off, not having sung a note. As a consequence poor old Menotti had to start the second half by staggering onstage and pretending that FL had been sadly summoned by a family crisis. What a way to spend your birthday.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

The critics used to slag her off, saying it was all hype and she couldn't paint, and was only famous for taking drugs and being a stripper.
STELLA VINE
MODERN ART OXFORD
Now they're saying she's a pretty good figurative painter after all.
That sort of talk can kill a career!

Letters

Ministry of fun

Sir,

"The state declares that a condition of extreme gaiety and communal good humour shall prevail across the British nation for a period not exceeding 24 hours." – Prime Ministerial Decree No. 1, PE 1189 [20 July].

"Children dance for joy for 7,000th extended school" – Department for Children, Schools and Families press release, 28 August 2007.

Related? These scribes seem to have sprung from the same set of stem cells! Though having realised as much, I'm a bit scared even to have thought it, let alone written it down. Hang on, there's someone kicking at the door...

PHILIP BROCKLEHURST,

Twickenham.

Puffed up

Sir,

*Mr Hanly (Letters, 1192) is quite right that the lower orders get a pummelling in Yobs and The Premiersh*ts, but the Eye is actually quite catholic in its choice of targets. Polly Filla and It's Grim Up North London are nothing if not lampoons on the middle classes. And what of the pronouncements of Gnome/Strobes, and the St Cake's calendar? – a pasting for the upper classes, surely?*

What is refreshing about the Eye is its preparedness to give anyone a good kicking, if dishonesty, hypocrisy or stupidity are in evidence.

Yours, not cancelling his subscription, but hoping he'll get next year's free for this gratuitous puff,

TIM HOPKINS,

Luton.

Tone deaf to criticism

Sir

"Hagen Dazs" invites me to outdo Wagner with my next opera. (Letters 1192).

He (or she) describes Wagner as the greatest egoist in music. But had the composer not possessed great self belief he could never, against all odds, have realized his visions for the world.

It follows that musical ability is not enough, especially for those who, like me, find their work innately challenging to the status quo presiding powers. Self belief, even excessive self belief, is a minimal requirement, but also the humility of self knowledge and self criticism.

The ancient atonalist establishment, though, is married to self abnegation as its chosen way of life.

It therefore responds to being challenged with fervid horror.

A composer hoping now to write "from the heart to the heart" as Beethoven said, and as Arvo Part asked me to do, is up against even greater odds than was Wagner. Those who control this world fear the power of the heart, of unfettered emotion in the limitless range enabled in tonality, which is what music exists to convey.

This is an energy that empowers the people over and against the elites.

You ask who am I, Mr "Hagen Dazs", who are not man, woman – or ice cream – enough to reveal your true identity.

Listen to my music. Perhaps that will melt your cold heart.

Yours

KEITH BURSTEIN,

Via email.

Taking the pish

Sir,

I know the Eye likes to exhibit its anti-Scottish racist views regularly, i.e. weekly (witness number crunching p7 issue 1192 as the latest example). You want a good number crunch... How much does London whip away each month in oil revenue from Scotland? And for how many years has it done this? Check it out. Sure beats any extra public funding Scotland receives. This is a country that would have been the most energy rich country in Europe... if this oil wealth had not been used to subsidise the rest of the UK over the past decades. But listen, I am sure they are happy to share with the rest of the UK, so long as London does not start whimpering on now about relatively smaller amounts. London has had its (many billions of) pound of flesh. Here is an idea... just pay it back rather than the extra public funding? I am sure Scotland would welcome it.

Not yours,

DOESTHE I. MAIKITUP TOOSOOT ESQ,

Via email.

"We're not called young offenders' social workers any more. I'm a scum whisperer"

Following the Norm

Sir,

Judging by the article on page 3 and cartoon on page 8 of the latest issue, it seems that The Eye has swallowed the myth about leftists running the BBC. Has Lord Tebbit joined your editorial team, I wonder?

TIM WRIGHT,

Via email.

Poor treatment

Sir,

I believe Jane Colby's comments (letters 1191) reflect worrying and dangerous attitudes held by sections of the "ME community".

Ms Colby asserts the existence of a separate "classic ME" that is self-defining: if you recover from your illness by a graded activity programme you "either do not have classic ME or are substantially recovered already". Er... says who?

My partner Katy was ill with ME from age 14 to 26, missing out on school, university, travelling and work. She was severely disabled and distressed at her condition, and was getting worse. She recovered, slowly and fully, using a carefully structured graded-activity programme, combined with very low doses of anti-depressant medication and some psychotherapy. The activity programme helped her to remain active without "overdoing it"; the drugs helped form a crucial regular sleep pattern; the therapy helped counter the often unhelpful perfectionist tendencies common to many ME sufferers.

Of course, graded activity can be done badly (eg by not finding proper base-lines, focusing only on physical activity, ignoring the importance of sleep pattern) but Ms Colby should not throw out the baby with the bathwater. We have encountered many in the "ME community" who wrongly seem to think the illness can't be "real" if it can be treated using the graded-activity method. So these sufferers (and carers) often shut down and hold out for the invention of a vaccine or wonder-drug, as if acknowledging their "fatigue syndrome" would be to dismiss their illness as mere "character weakness". They therefore needlessly and tragically reject effective routes to recovery, preferring, it seems, to remain righteous, but terribly ill. Alternatively, sufferers can check out www.me-cfs-recovery.co.uk to help them counter the poorly managed programmes Ms Colby mentions.

Yours faithfully,

GLENN BASSETT,

Enfield, Middx.

Scenes You Seldom See

"Hello, Mr Greaves. This is Bhaska. I am ringing back, as promised, to say that we have solved your problem"

Bin stupid

Sir,

Re: your pic of Lib Dem MP Saj Karim in the last issue (1192), hasn't he yet learned to flatten the plastic bottles before putting them into the wrong bin? Does he work for Coca-Cola or something? He's never gone to the tip before in his life, that's obvious. I think I'll have to vote Tory, curses.

Yours,

JOHN BAILEY

Combwich, Bridgwater.

Lookalike

Morrice

May

Sir,

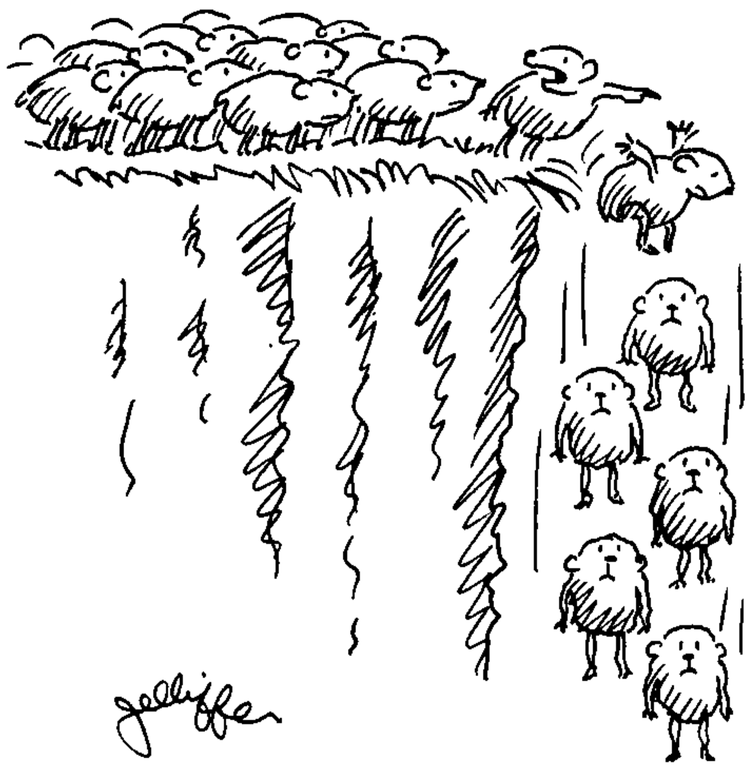
We have waited 300 years for publication of the diaries of Roger Morrice, 17th-century cleric and investigative journalist, to whom was leaked the secrets of the monarchs then ruling. Only 30 years have elapsed since the start of the astronomical PhD thesis of Brian May, guitarist for Queen and the Queen, now submitted. Both authors share imperial hair styles. Could they be related?

Yours sincerely,

TERRY MOTT,

Woodbridge, Suffolk.

☛ See over...



"Remember, everybody – we're tombstoning this one!"

Rath of the gods

Sir,

Your review of Gods Behaving Badly *notes that rather similar themes have been used by other authors – can I also suggest Tom Holt for gods operating in the modern world (*Expecting Someone Taller, My Hero*...), Douglas Adams for chief god as bedridden and gaga (Wotan, in his case, but then...* Long Dark Tea Time of the Soul*) Terry Pratchett for gods going down in the world as people stop believing in them, and retiring to a suburban villa to have arguments over lawnmowers (Discworld novels), the Underworld reached via the Underground (John Collier, and, as it happens, me...).*

I shall certainly read Gods Behaving Badly. *It sounds fun. But "utterly original"?*

Yours,
TINA RATH,

Via email.

Lookalike

Gok

Kate

Sir,

I wonder if any of your readers have noticed the striking resemblance between Gok Wan, presenter of the TV show "How To Look Good Naked" and Kate Silverton, news presenter and superwoman.

Could they by any chance be related?

Yours sincerely,
BRIAN LEEDHAM,

W. Ewell, Surrey.

Tallis tale

Sir,

Re Bookworm's comments on Ian McEwan's Atonement *(Eye 1192).*

I don't think young Bryony Tallis's capacity to understand the C word is the only, or main, problem for the novel's supposedly "unassailable" status. As literary improbabilities go, this is a fairly benign one.

Far more serious, in my view, is the fact that Atonement *is, in the end, chiefly a novel about novel-writing. It therefore belongs to a genre not notable for producing great works of literature.*

Unfortunately, the real subject of Atonement *doesn't become clear until the final twist in the tale, when Bryony Tallis, now an elderly writer, takes centre-stage, and reveals, among other things, that the narrative up to now may or may not be true – a revelation which inevitably trivialises the whole caboodle, and ought to have infuriated critics much more than it actually has (because Tallis – and, by implication, McEwan also – has been playing a game with us throughout). To be fair, this makes* Atonement *far more original than it might have otherwise been, but also far less substantial.*

The sole issue remaining thereafter (an issue implicitly presented as much more important than all that fusty old stuff about guilt, redemption and actual atonement), is Bryony's desire for "atonement" in a very rarefied, aesthetic sense – the sort of sense appropriate to novelists – and, more abstractly, the moral and aesthetic rights and responsibilities of novelists per se. *We go from pathos to bathos in a few short pages.*

Yours faithfully,
JAMES WARD,

Wadhurst, E. Sussex.

Sir,

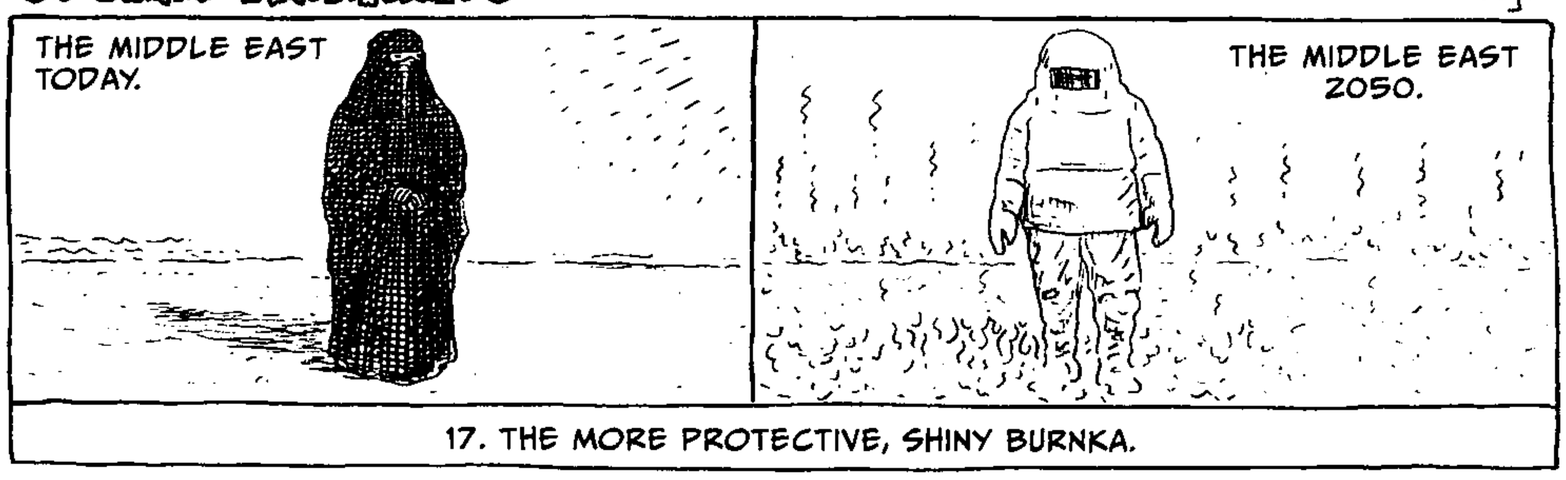
When I wrote the York Notes A-level guide to Atonement, *I carried out rigorous research into the question of whether a 13-year-old girl in the 1930s would understand the word "cunt". This involved subjecting a representative sample of a friend in her 80s, Edna, to the enforced reading of the novel and subsequent ruthless grilling about which rude words she might have understood when she was 13. She was certain that she personally could have worked out the meaning of "cunt" from the context at that age and that some of her contemporaries would certainly have been familiar with the word already.*

Maybe critics failed to mention the issue in their reviews not because they hadn't thought about it, but because they had thought about it and decided there is nothing to say. Or perhaps because they feared that if they put their name to a column which brought the words "13-year-old girl" and "cunt" into close proximity they would be investigated by the thought police for paedophiliac intentions.

Regards,
ANNE ROONEY,

Cambridge.

Tibet's living Buddhas have been banned from reincarnation without permission from China's atheist leaders. *Times*



Notes & queries

Sir,

Mike Barfield's observations in issue 1192 depict a Pole playing Scrabble clearly relishing the prospects of his next move. This suggests he is playing the Polish version of the game, which appears to have a major flaw in that the letters V and X do not feature in the Polish alphabet.

Now this has got me thinking. If any of your readers have information regarding availability of Polish language Scrabble I would dearly like to know, as the prospect of playing with three Zs (Z Ź Ż) sounds like an excellent remedy for insomnia.

Regards,
BOLESLAW USARZEWSKI,

London N16.

Sir,

Reference the recent inclusion in Colmanballs of a comment from Damon Hill (Issue 1191). With correct use of grammar it makes perfect sense.

"I'm not Lewis, but if I were, me, I would be furious." It may not be the purest Queen's English but at least now the emphasis is in the correct place.

(Lynne Truss would be proud of me.)

Regards,
SIMON BILL,

Cheltenham, Glos.

Sir,

Even Jadum Bonum (BonAE, surely... "et tu, Brute"... &c – perhaps you should have asked her) would probably know that the Latin for Leeds is either Loidis (QV Venerable Bede, "Hist. Eccles"., where he describes the Battle of the Winwaed as "apud Loidis in Comitatu Ebor" or, more disputably, Leodis, hence the rather pretentious title of the Leeds Grammar School magazine, "The Leodiensian".

JOANNES CAROLUS
(aka John Charles),

London NW8.

Sir,

Raj Kothari is not being "pedantic" in pointing out that Rodgers & Hammerstein wrote "You'll Never Walk Alone" for the film Carousel; he's just being wrong. They wrote the song for the stage musical Carousel, opened 1945; it wasn't filmed till 11 years later.

Yours even more pedantically,
MICHAEL GROSVENOR MYER,

Cambridge.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"That was a win that was stolen out of the jaws of victory."
NICK KNIGHT, Sky Sports 1
(Robert Lyons)

"Inevitably there's going to be a lot of wailing of teeth in the newspapers tomorrow."
JOHN INVERDALE, BBC1
(Peter Quigley)

"The team played better in the second half than they are capable of."
Newstalk 106 Radio (Dublin)
(Frank Flanagan)

"The umbilical safety cord of the transfer window has been shut."
DOMINIC JOHNSON, Virgin Radio
(Chris Walmsley)

"We need someone to bat for our corner..."
MARK HUGHES, BBC
(Ian White)

Letter from **Tehran**

from Our Own Correspondent

IN most countries politicians press the flesh as much as possible. But here in Iran things aren't so simple. Men shaking hands with women is taboo for the guardians of our Islamic conscience. So when conservative websites starting showing a video of our former president Mohammad Khatami paw to paw with some smiling European women, it wasn't to raise his approval rating.

Conservatives have been nervous that the suave Khatami, rather than disappearing to write his memoirs or start pistachio farming, has stayed in the public eye so much he's talked about as a presidential candidate in the 2009 election.

Not that Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, the present incumbent, seems worried. Over half-way into his first term, the citizen president shows no sign of flagging in his country-wide tours on which he promises the people new roads, sports centres and cheap bank loans.

He's usually to be found flying round in a light plane dropping money out the back – which he can afford to since rising oil prices have put billions in government coffers. State TV reports every detail of Mr Ahmadinejad's trips, reminding us what a man of the people he is. In fact, the only people who love him more than our villagers and tribes people are the Israelis. His fiery speech about Israel being "wiped off the map" and his doubts about the Holocaust helped Israel secure $30bn of the latest hi-tech weaponry from the US.

Last month the president was among the first to congratulate Lebanon's Hizbollah on the anniversary of their heroic "victory" in the 2006 war with Israel (1,200 dead Lebanese and $3bn worth of damage). He claimed another great "victory" with petrol rationing, introduced in June to the accompaniment of rioting. Although we have the second highest reserves of crude oil in the world, our insatiable desire for cheap, government-subsidised petrol meant we had been importing 40 percent of what we used, costing us a whopping $5bn last year.

The obvious answer would have been to raise the price, which had been frozen for years at 800 tomans (about nine cents) a litre.

Well, Mr Ahmadinejad did raise the price a little (to 1,000 tomans, or 11 cents), but the clincher was to limit each driver to 100 litres a month. At first we made fewer weekend trips and some of us even walked or took the bus. The air in Tehran became almost breathable again and we could even see Damavand mountain, our much-loved, 5,000m peak. But then we realized we could buy our six months' allocation in advance, so we didn't need to miss our daily fix. Presumably we'll run out in coming months, but that's the future. As we may get attacked by the Americans anytime, today is what matters, so why walk when you can drive.

Under Ahmadinejad the future of a growing number of "thugs" has also been curtailed, many rapists and murderers having been executed in public. It's not pretty as the condemned are hoisted up by the neck on cranes, where they take several minutes to choke to death, some having been lashed first.

Two men who had murdered a judge were hanged this summer in a busy Tehran street just outside the judicial department where they'd wasted the judge. Not what you want to see on the way back from lunch, but hard to ignore.

A number of cases have involved sexual misdemeanors. In July, for example, a man was stoned to death for committing adultery. And television aired the confessions of 12 condemned men about to face the noose in Tehran's Evin prison for "rape, sodomy and assault". Homosexuality, in case you hadn't guessed, is a capital offence here where it's seen as even more disgusting than shaking hands with a woman.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● "God and I closed a contract when I was baptised," Pavel Mircea told the public prosecutor in Timisoara, "but God has not kept his side of the bargain. He was supposed to protect me from all evils, but instead He gave me to Satan, who encouraged me to kill. Under the Romanian criminal code, God has clearly committed numerous criminal offences, including fraud, breach of trust, abuse of a position of authority, desertion, and misappropriation of goods. And He has accepted prayers and sacrificial offerings without providing any kind of services in exchange. He has failed to deliver on His promises as advertised, and I am therefore demanding financial compensation for all the money I have spent on candles and church services, from God, resident in heaven, and his representatives in Romania, the Orthodox church."

Mircea, who is serving a twenty-year sentence for murder, later saw his lawsuit rejected by the Public Prosecutor. "We could not find God's home address," a spokesman told reporters, "and as He has no legal address, He cannot be taken to court." On behalf of the Romanian Orthodox Church, spokeswoman Constantin Stoica added "God does not act without our will, and people have the freedom to choose between good and evil. I have asked the prison chaplain to make this clear to Mr Mircea. If that fails, the warders will deal with it." *(Evenimentul Zilei [Romania], 11/707. Spotter: Donny Coutts)*

– ● –

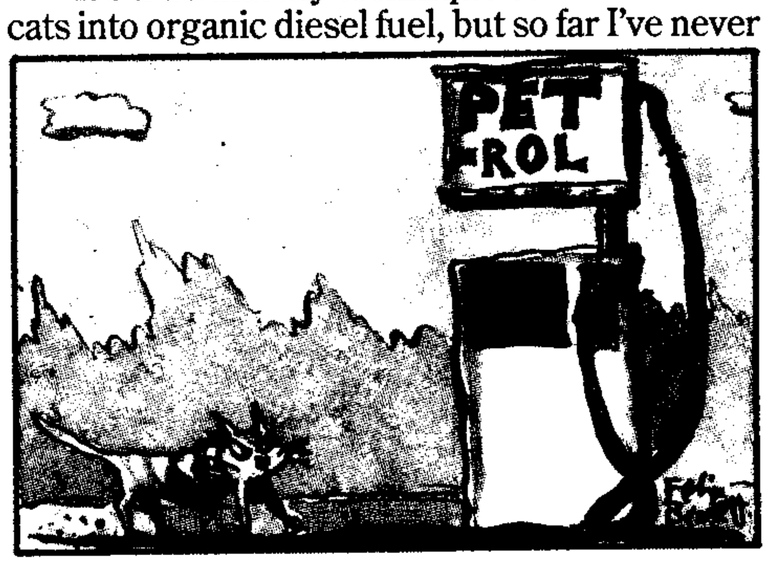
● *"The Japanese have been getting fatter and fatter," Satomi Onishi of the Public Health Insurance Office told reporters in Osaka, "especially men in their twenties and thirties. We estimate that nearly twenty million people are at risk from obesity, heart disease, and type 2 diabetes, and we are concerned that many people no longer understand the principles of nutrition. However, everyone has a mobile phone nowadays, so we are encouraging those at risk to take a picture of each meal they wish to eat before they eat it, and send it to us for computer analysis. That way, we can tell them if it's okay, or advise them not to eat it, and recommend a healthier alternative instead."*

About a hundred cardiac patients have so far signed up to a trial cell phone meal analysis service, run by the Kansai Medical University from Hirakata Hospital. "Patients used to fill out meal logs," explained Dr Yutaka Kimura, "but the system was slow, and they tended to forget things, or underestimate their portions. Photographing meals in advance and e-mailing them to us is easier and gives more accurate results. We can rapidly calculate the precise calorie, fat, and sugar levels from the photograph, and plans are underway to extend this scheme nationwide. It will make it much easier for people to eat healthily, and we hope to see a 25% reduction in obesity by 2015." (The Japan Times, 26/5/07. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)

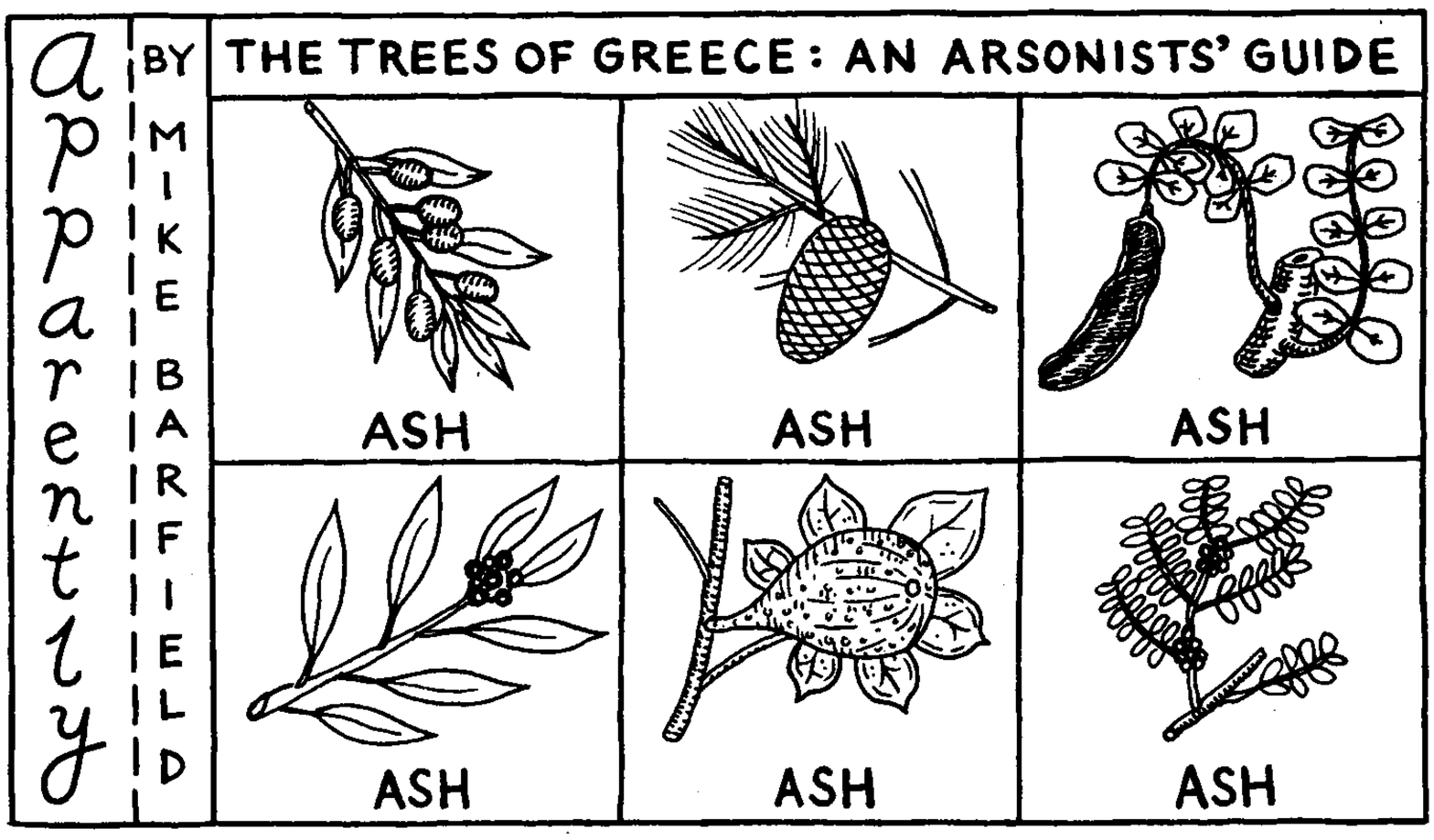
– ● –

● "With the price of oil escalating, and the threat of global terrorism, the world is in urgent need of a viable alternative to oil," Dr Christian Koch told reporters in Kleinhartmannsdorf. "So when I announced that I had developed a method to produce fuel from waste material, I had expected positive coverage of my pioneering technique. But instead, the headline in the Bild newspaper last Wednesday was 'German inventor can turn cats into fuel – for a tank he needs 20 cats,' and ever since I've been receiving hate mail from animal rights campaigners.

"It's true that my technique could turn dead cats into organic diesel fuel, but so far I've never



used a single one. Okay, the odd toad or two may have jumped into my patented KDV 500 machine, and perhaps a couple of rabbits, but I mostly produce my fuel from waste products such as paper, plastic, and textiles, with only a few animals thrown in. If I did use cats, each cadaver would produce about 2.5 litres of fuel, so yes, I would need about 20 cats to fill up my car's tank. But that's a theoretical calculation, and I wish to make it clear that I've never actually used so much as a single kitten." *(Deutsche Welle, 18/9/2005. Spotter: David Painter)*

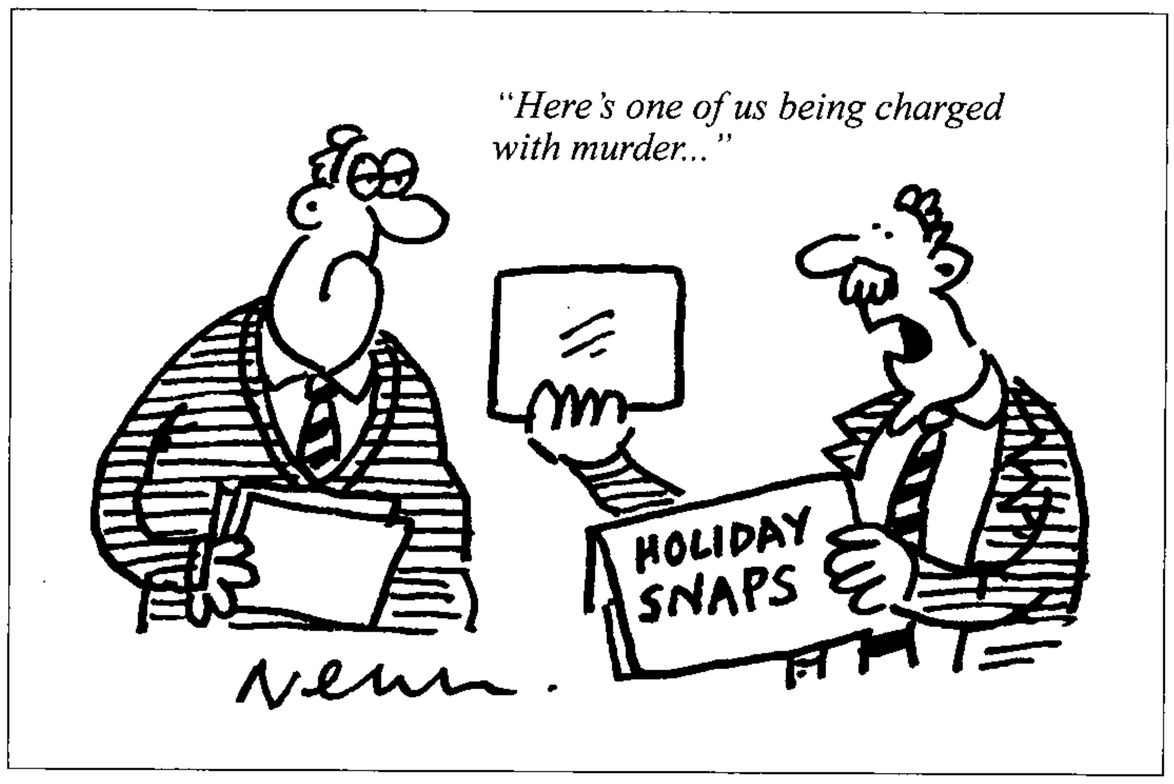


MADDIE
The Unanswered Questions

1. Why don't we know anything?
2. Why do we give so much space to something we know nothing about?
3. Isn't there anyone who has a clue what's going on?
4. Will we ever know anything?
5. When are we going to stop asking the unanswered questions?

MADDIE
The Timetable in Full

8.57 Editor asks hacks "What have we got on Maddie?"
9.00 Hacks turn on Sky TV for latest broadcast from Portugal.
9.04 Hacks desperately do Google search on "Maddie".
9.08 Editor throws tantrum.
9.12 Chief sub comes up with headline "MADDIE – THE UNANSWERED QUESTIONS".
9.15 Paper goes to bed.
9.16 Hacks go to the pub.



"You had to wait a long time for the top job... what's it like?"

THE McCANNS
An Apology

IN COMMON with all other newspapers we may have given the impression that we considered Kate and Gerry McCann to be model parents distraught with grief caught up in a nightmare beyond imagination. Headlines such as 'The Grief Of The McCanns', 'The Saddest Sorrow' and 'Prayers For The Suffering Couple' may have led readers to believe that our sympathy lay with the desperate and despairing parents of the missing toddler.

We now realise that these comments may well have been premature and that actually we had a niggling feeling all along that there was something a bit funny about them... just a bit too calm really... and all that going to see the Pope... could have been a smokescreen... I mean we're not saying she did it but who else could it have been and as for the DNA you can't fake that can you and what about the sniffer dogs, they're not going to be wrong are they?

In the light of the above considerations we would like to apologise to Mr and Mrs McCann for our earlier insinuations of their innocence.

THE PORTUGUESE POLICE
An Apology

IN COMMON with the rest of the media, we may have drawn attention to the alleged incompetence of the Portuguese police force. Headlines such as 'Porto Plods Haven't A Cluedo', 'Dago Dimwits Fail Again' and 'Foreigners Aren't Really Any Good At This Sort Of Thing' may have contributed to readers' belief that we have a low opinion of the Portuguese police force.

Nothing could be further from the truth. We would like to make it clear that we have always believed the Portuguese police to be highly efficient, diligent and dedicated – a worthy partner for the British police who together have now solved this appalling crime.

TOMORROW: Apology for the above Apologies.

Radio 4
What You Missed

Jim Naughtie: The sleepy little Leicestershire village of Rothley has never seen anything like it. An appalling media circus has descended like a plague of locusts on this sleepy little village in Leicestershire. Our reporter Phil Airtime is there now. Phil, what can you tell us?

Phil: Well, Jim, the people of the sleepy Leicestershire village of Rothley have been woken up by an appalling media circus that has descended like a plague of locusts on this sleepy Leicestershire village.

Naughtie: So, what's the scene there, Phil?

Phil: Well, I can see literally hundreds of reporters from all over the world reporting on how the appalling media circus has descended like a plague of locusts on this sleepy Leicestershire village.

Naughtie: And what's the feeling there amongst the local people, Phil?

Phil: Well I'm just ringing the doorbell of one of the sleepy villagers now.

(Sound of doorbell ringing)

Good morning, sir, how do you feel about the invasion of your sleepy little village by an appalling media circus? Do you think that they are like a plague of locusts?

(Sound of violent scuffle)

Naughtie: Oh dear, we seem to have lost Phil there. So now it's time for Thought for the Day and our speaker today is the Chief Imam of the Bluewater Mosque, Jihad Al Q'aeda-Smith.

Imam: Good morning Jim. Well, I was coming here this morning on the bus and I thought to myself, "Wouldn't it be a good idea to blow it up?" And, you know, in a real sense, perhaps we all of us have a duty to

(cont. 94 kHz)

PRIME MINISTERIAL DECREE NO. 4

From the Desk of the Supreme Leader

Comrades,

As you all know, there was no greater blot on the record of our glorious Party than the unpardonable blunder of the disgraced former leader in invading Iraq at the orders of the hated Yankee imperialist warmonger Bush.

But, in accordance with the new thinking of the Age of Change, this criminal error has now been rectified by my prompt and decisive action.

Our gallant troops, rather than being sent needlessly to their deaths, as was inevitable under the policies of Comrade Blair, have been rescued on my orders and sent to the safe haven of Basra Airport, pending their long overdue return home to Afghanistan.

Let me make it clear that the decision in 2003 to launch an illegal war of aggression against the peace-loving citizens of Iraq was taken by the former leader in secret.

Members of the Politburo, including myself, were kept wholly in the dark.

The first I knew about Comrade Blair's infamous plan was when I heard it reported on the Today programme.

Comrades, it is impossible for me to convey the sense of anger and shame that I experienced when I realised what had been done in the name of the Party.

I decided to register my protest by saying nothing for three years, until I was acclaimed Supreme Leader.

I hope that will end any further attempts by revisionist malcontents to tar me with the bloodstained brush of Busho-Blairism.

Meanwhile, there are still regrettably minority elements in the Party and wider society who have not grasped the essential principle of the New Politics which now prevails in the Age of Change.

As I have made clear, all issues are now to be resolved in a spirit of national consensus.

Gone are the days when we wasted hours of valuable effort on endless discussions and debates between rival cliques, cabals and party factions.

In the new Age of Consensus we speak with only one voice, which is that of your leader.

To me falls the solemn duty of speaking for the People, whose views I now intend to canvas by means of my new Citizens' Juries.

Gone are the frivolous days of the hated and discredited focus groups, in which the former leader used to rubber-stamp his arbitrary initatives in the name of Crypto-Blairite-Thirdwayism.

Now the will of the People is to be expressed through the Citizens' Juries, carefully selected by the Party leadership to reflect the views of all those who agree with me.

Of course, there are certain matters of state which are too complex for Citizens' Juries to be permitted to consider.

For example, there is the new "Treaty" adopted by the supreme EU Council, which a Citizens' Jury might wrongly conclude was some form of "Constitution".

As I have repeatedly made clear, this new "Constitreaty" will be ratified by Parliament acting under my instructions in a free vote.

I therefore have every confidence that the spirit of the Age of Consensus will once again prevail, and there will therefore be no need for me to reintroduce a policy of internal exile for wreckers, backsliders and other subversives.

Yours fraternally,

Gadar Brown

The Supreme Leader

NOTICE

Congratulations to new Comrades Bercow, Mercer and Eliach who have seen the error of their ways. In a joint public statement the three confessed, "We wrongly followed the misguided principles of Cameronism and freely acknowledge our guilt." They then pledged whole-hearted allegiance to the New Politics and to the Supreme Leader. G.B.

THE IRON LADY ACCLAIMS THE NEW LEADER

The Mother of the Nation, Comrade Lady Thatcher, this week saluted the glorious achievements of the Supreme Leader, praising him for continuing to take the nation forward in the spirit of Thatchero-Tebbitism. She particularly commended the decisive way in which he had moved to stamp out dissent in the workers' movement, with their plans to disrupt the new Age of Consensus by launching a Siberian-style Winter of Discontent.

"I see him as the Iron Leader," stated Comrade Thatcher to a standing ovation from thousands of delegates in what has now been renamed "Brown Square".

The Supreme Leader promised 'British Jobs For British Workers' in direct contrast to the previously discredited policies of unchecked immigration. "In the Age of Change," said the Supreme Leader, "only workers who can speak British will be entitled to unemployment."

"Apologies, Galileo, but did you have the brothel across the street in mind when you invented your telescope?"

CHARITY APPEAL

HELP SAVE LITTLE BARCLAYS

In the last few weeks we have seen harrowing images from the terrible financial disaster that has hit the first world. Innocent banks like little Barclays, along with helpless private equity companies and hedge funds have been swept away in a tidal wave of greed that was entirely of their own making.

But you can help. Just write to the Bank of England at once and demand that the nation bales out these poor rich victims before they are reduced to their last bonus.

Q: What will £5 buy?

A: Nothing. They need £500bn for starters.

Address all correspondence to:
The Governor, The Bank of England, Queer Street, London.

Last week's train records in full

Paris to London
St Pancras *(Eurostar TGV)*..... Two hours three minutes

London Kings Cross to Oxford Circus
(London Underground RMT)..... Three hours sixteen minutes

FEET-ON-SEAT TRAIN GIRL SHOCKER

by Our Transport Staff **Dee Rail**

THERE was widespread amazement last night over the story of the girl who put her feet up on a train seat.

"It defies belief," said one railyway expert. "This implies that the girl was sitting rather than standing, that the seat opposite her was empty rather than occupied by a family of ten, that there was a railway employee somewhere on the train and that the train in question was actually moving."

He continued, "Any one of these occurrences would be extarordinary but for them all to happen together is almost incredible.

"Have the railways gone stark staring bonkers *(Cont. p. 94)*

FILM CHOICE

High Gulan Noon

REMAKE of the classic Eastern in which Sir Gulan Noon rides into town with his bag full of money. Will Sheriff Brown stand up to him or just give him a peerage? Haunting theme tune 'Do Not Forsake me, Alastair Darling'.

Cast In Full

Sheriff Brown.....Robbie Coltrane
Sir Gulan Noon.....Sir Ben Kingsley
Jacqui Smith.....Ruth "Grace" Kelly
"Two Horse" Prescott.....The Late Les Dawson

*COMING SOON **'Curry on Gulan'**. Remake of comedy classic. Trouble starts when curry magnate Sir Gulan Noon asks for a peerage. Starring Jim Dale as Inspector Yates, Charles Hawtrey as Sir Gulan Noon, Kenneth Williams as Lord Levy and Barbara Windsor as Ruth Turner.*

FREE WITH THE GUARDIAN
Great Interviews of the 21st Century

No 94 Alan Rusbridger interviews his daughter

Rusbridger: Would you like a job on the Guardian?

Rusbridger: Yes please

Mrs Shakespeare

by Germaine Greer

MALE scholars have always assumed wrongly that Shakespeare was a man. All the evidence suggests that the plays were in fact written by a strong, independent, possibly Australian woman living with a lot of ducks near the M11.

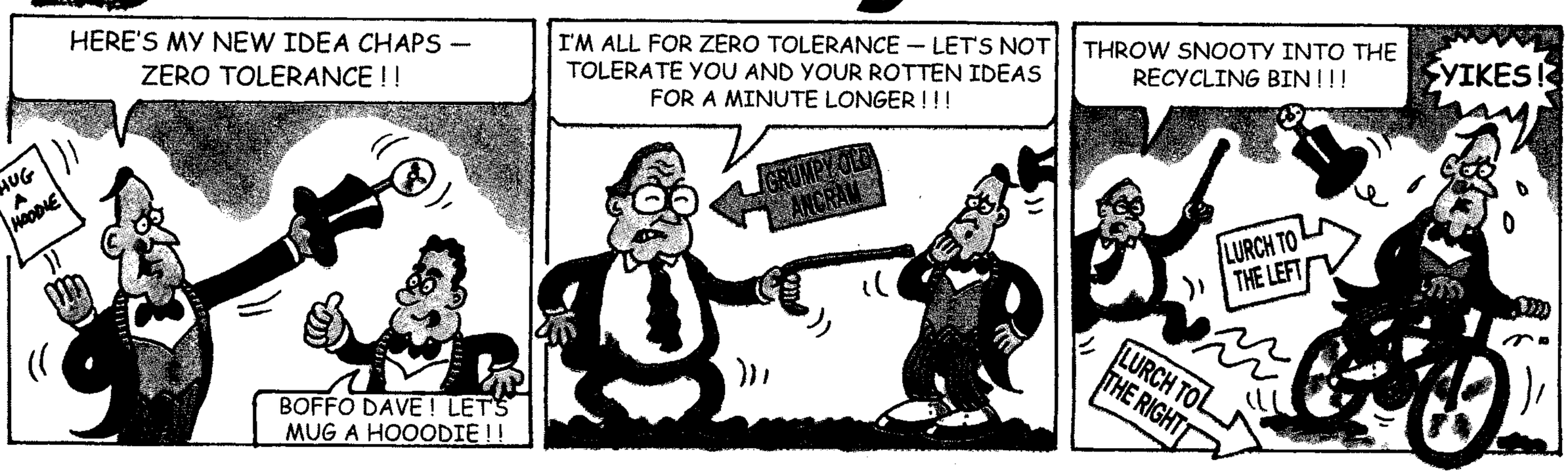
Consider the play "Ozello", the tragic story of a brilliant feminist author who comes to England and is murdered by jealous male critics who *(cont'd p94)*

New study

JUNK FOOD LINKED TO CHILDREN'S HEALTH PROBLEMS

OTHER STUDIES
- Bears linked to excrement in woods
- Catholics linked to Pope

Dave Snooty AND HIS PALS


HERE'S MY NEW IDEA CHAPS — ZERO TOLERANCE!!
HUG A HOODIE
BOFFO DAVE! LET'S MUG A HOOODIE!!
I'M ALL FOR ZERO TOLERANCE — LET'S NOT TOLERATE YOU AND YOUR ROTTEN IDEAS FOR A MINUTE LONGER!!!
GRUMPY OLD ANGRAM
THROW SNOOTY INTO THE RECYCLING BIN!!!
YIKES!
LURCH TO THE LEFT
LURCH TO THE RIGHT

AN OPEN LETTER TO ALL LONDONERS EVERYWHERE

from The Rt Hon Boris Johnson MP, OE

What ho, my old Cockney sparrers!

Just thought I'd let you know what I'm going to do when I'm Mayor!

As you all know, I was born and bred within the sound of Eton's famous bells!

So that makes me a Londoner through and through, what!

As the old song has it, "I belong to London, dear old London town, tumpty-tumpty-tum. London belongs to me!'

Anyway, enough fooling about. I'm jolly serious about this London Mayor lark!

And when Boris says he's being serious, it's no time to laugh

So pay attention, you there at the back. Boris has got a 10-point plan for London, which, as they say down the Old Kent Road, is pretty apples-and-pears!

So, here they are:

❶ CRIME

More bobbies on the beat. Everyone I know who lives in London is jolly worried about getting mugged by one of these hoodie chaps. Well, Boris is going to put a stop to all that. Friend Plod is going to have to get out of his office and start pounding the jolly old beat, clipping a few of these yobboes round the lughole, or even bashing them on the head with a truncheon. That'll sort it all out!

❷ TRANSPORT

If ever friend Ken made a hash of things it was getting in these Bendy Bus things! How are they meant to get down the Underground? And they don't even have an upstairs. Bring back those wonderful Routemaster trains, that's Boris's recipe for getting London moving again!

As for that ridiculous Congestion Charge, I'm all for it! You've got to hand it to Ken there! He certainly knows what he's doing, unlike yours truly!

And while we're on the subject of the Underground, I tried to get on it the other day and Ken had closed it all down! That doesn't make sense, does it? When I'm Mayor, I'm going to open it all up again. And that's a promise!

Oh, and one other thing I'm going to do is ban buses from using the bus lanes, so that we cyclists don't have to risk our lives every time we pedal off to Westminster.

❸ EVERYTHING ELSE

You can't expect me to have the answer to everything on day one. Boris has got to do his prep before we get onto all that schools and hospitals malarkey.

But I'll tell you one thing. This London's a bloody big place! I've just looked it up on the internet. Cripes, it's enormous! It fills up the whole of London!

Anyway, that's enough for now. Next week I'll have some more brilliant ideas for turning London into the capital of Britain.

Your Mayor-to-be,

Boris

YES, IT'S BORIS JOHNSON COCKNEY RHYMING SLANG!

Rosie Lee – *OE*

Pony and Trap – *Jolly nice chap*

Barnet Fair – *Silly hair*

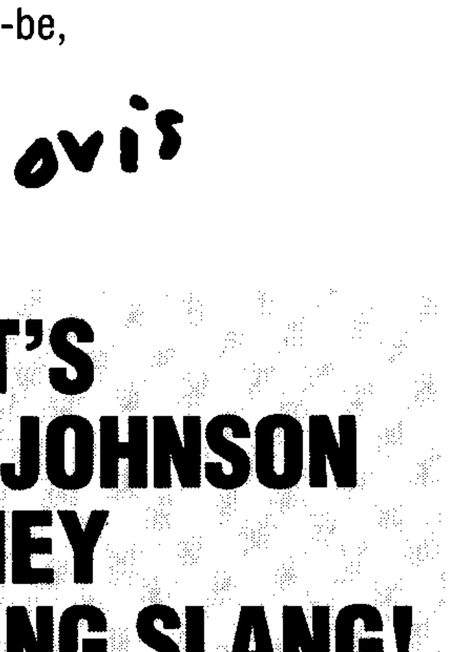
Boat Race – *Boat Race*

Rub-a-dub-dub – *The Garrick Club*

Berkely Hunt – *Darius Guppy*

Trouble and strife – *Don't tell my wife*

(That's enough. Ed.)



TV - What you will never see

How We Can Save The Planet

A 24-Hour BBC Special with Ricky Gervais and Jonathan Ross

(Huge studio full of people, silly music, flashing lights)

Jonathan Ross *(for it is he)*: Hello Britain! We're here to stop global wanking *(massive laughter)*.

Producer's voice *(off)*: It's global 'warming', Jonathan.

Ross: Whatever. And now can you welcome my good fwend Wicky Gervais, who's going to do a dance to bwing wain to all those poor people in Afwica.

(Enter man in black t-shirt who does silly dance)

Ross: And now, in a totally unpwecedented gesture, we're asking the entire Bwitish nation to save the planet by turning off their television sets.

(Short pause)

Producer: Oh dear! They already have.

(ENDS)

WE WILL MATCH LABOUR ON EVERYTHING – TORY PLEDGE

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Bore**

DAVID Cameron, the leader of the Conservative Party, today outwitted his opponents by unveiling a shock new series of Tory policies designed to win the next election.

"We promise," he told supporters (Sid and Boris Johnson), "that the Conservatives will retain every one of Labour's spending plans for the next three years.

"Anyone who thinks we might be foolish enough to look for ways to cut spending by eliminating waste must be mad.

"Furthermore," said Mr Cameron, "we will not only match their spending plans – we will match every single one of their policies on every subject, no matter how stupid.

"If you want a Tory government, vote Labour! You know it makes sense."

Mr Cameron is 48 points behind on the polls.

CAMERON ROCKED BY TORY GRANDEE'S ASTONISHING OUTBURST

by Our Political Staff **Peter O'Nonothimagain**

JUST AS the Tory Party were surging behind in the polls, their fragile unity was shattered when top Tory Michael Andrex (formerly the Marquess of Toiletpaper) launched a fatal torpedo which left Cameron sinking faster than the Titanic.

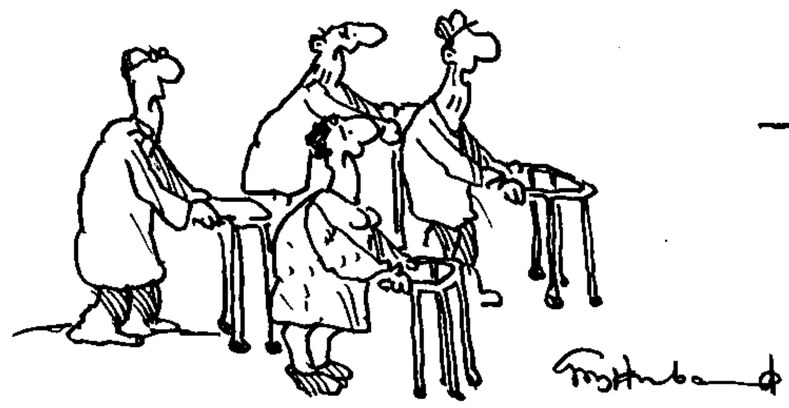
In a 486-page pamphlet privately distributed to members of his family (one of whom sent it to the *Daily Telegraph*), Mr Anchorman (formerly Lord Lurpak) said, "It's jolly well time David came up with some proper Conservative policies and stopped bashing up Mrs Thatcher.

"No one could be more behind David than me but, let's face it, at least she won three elections, and he hasn't won any. That speaks for itself.

"Anyway, I don't want to be disloyal, but I do think it's time David got some older, wiser people around him, like this chap Michael Anagram (formerly Lord Scrabble). He's awfully good."

ON OTHER PAGES – Supermarkets tell Tories "Take back unwanted packaging. We don't want it."

"Hoodies! Form a circle!"



AN EYE PROMOTIONAL FEATURE

Yes! It's here at last

The iPod Touch

Q So what's the unique feature of the iPod Touch?

A Simple: Apple touches you for £269 for a product you've already got, you don't need, which won't work very well and which will be obsolete within a couple of weeks.

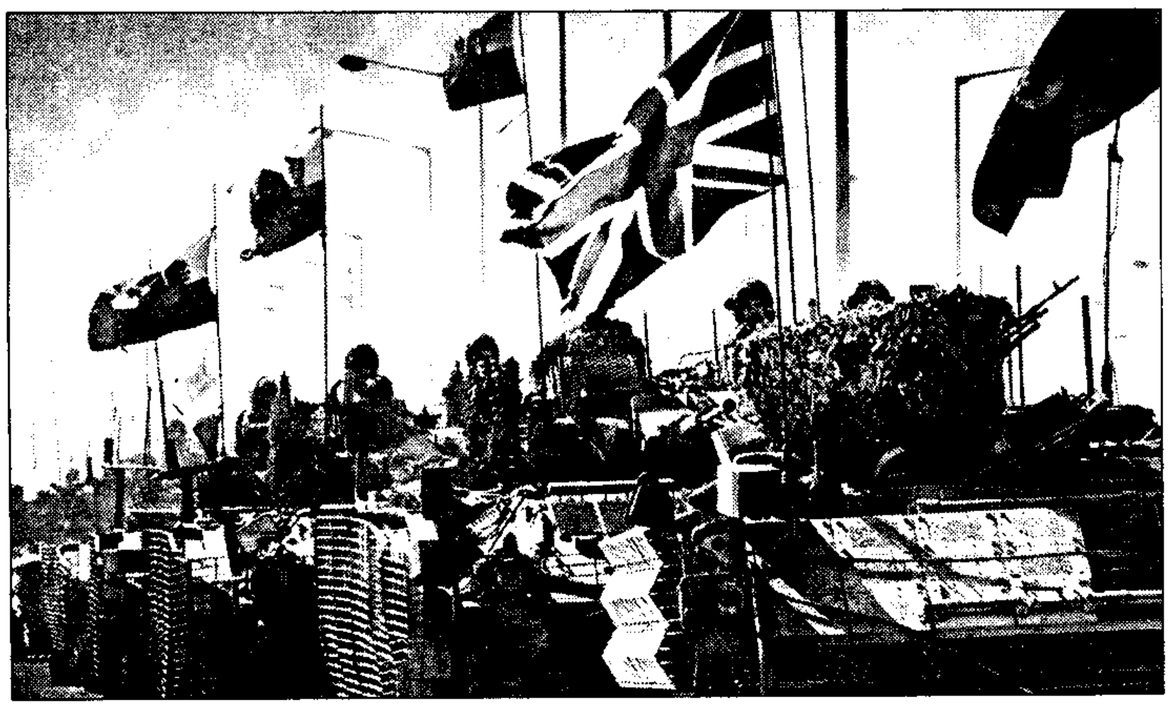
Q What does Apple's Steve Jobs say about the ultra-slim device?

A He says, "It's one of the Seven Wonders Of The World – the way we get away with taking your money for this stuff!"

THE BROON-ITES

THE CELTIC COMEDIANS CO-OPTING THE CONSERVATIVES!

GORDON... YE KEN YERSEL' WHEN YE SAID YE'D INTRODUCE A NEW KIND OF POLITICS, DIFFERENT FROM THAT SCUNNER BLAIR?
AYE, AH DID AT THAT. 'BROONISM' IS SWEEPIN' THA NATION AS WE SPEAK...
POP
BROON ALE
IT'S JUST THAT WE'VE NOTICED THAT YE'VE INVITED TWA TORIES AN' A LIB DEM TAE TAK' WEE TOKEN ROLES IN OOR ADMINISTRATION THAT ARE OF NAE IMPORTANCE WHITSOEVER...
JUST SO'S YOU CAN EMBARRASS THA' OPPOSITION...
AYE! EXACTLY LIKE THAT SCUNNER BLAIR DID IN '97!
WHIT? HAUD YER WHEESHT YE SCUNNERS! BLAIR DID THAT AS A CYNICAL PIECE O' POLITICKING!
WHEREAS AH'VE MADE A PRINCIPLED MOVE TAE USHER IN A NEW KIND O' POLITICS TAE DRAW IN THA' WIDEST RANGE O' TALENTS AN' EXPERTISE!
SORRY GORDON.
AYE, SORRY WE DOUBTED YE.
AN' BESIDES, YE HAVE TAE ADMIT...
THOROUGHLY ASHAMED OF THEMSELVES
PUFF
PUFF
POP
IV
BROON ALE
THE AULD TABLE WAS GETTING AWFY RICKETY, WASN'T IT?
HELP MA BOAB!
CRIVVENS...
AND JINGS!!!
HENRY DAVIES



VICTORIOUS TROOPS RETREAT FROM BASRA

by Our Man On A Flight Home To London **Dan Kirk**

TONIGHT I saw with my own eyes one of the most glorious moments in the history of the British Army, as it retreated in triumph in the middle of the night from Basra.

Blenheim, Waterloo, St Pancras and now... Basra. This is the roll-call of honour that will live for ever in the minds of generations of schoolchildren.

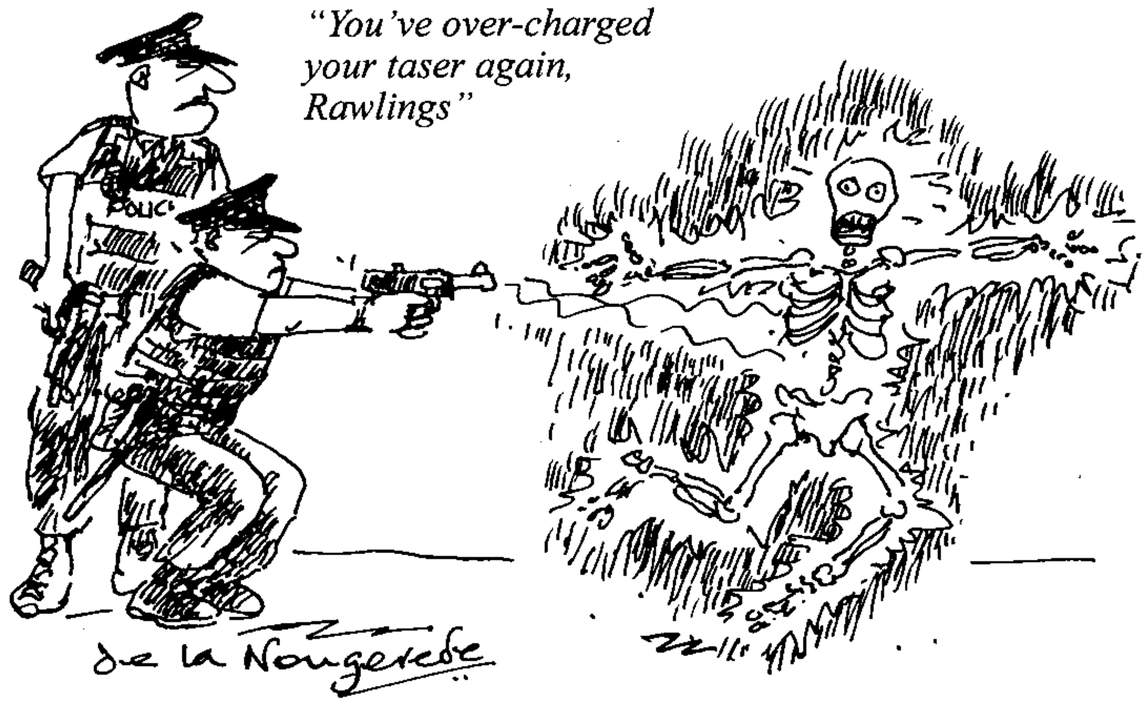
A lone bugle sounded the advance, which marked the end of one of the most heroic and successful campaigns in the history of the British Army. *(You've done this bit. Ed.)*

In 2003, the British marched into Basra with bands playing and heads held high, bent on bringing democracy, law and order to a war-torn land.

Four years later, their task was completed. As the Commanding Officer, General Withdrawal, told me yesterday, "We've now got to the point where we can hand over the city quite safely to the Shi-ite militias. They are very well trained by the Iranians and have done a splendid job in killing our chaps *(Don't put that in, old boy... bad for morale!)*".

Within an hour of leaving Basra, our victorious troops were rapidly advancing to the airport ready for the final surge back to Heathrow.

For free Gnome 'Victory In Basra' plate offer, see p. 94



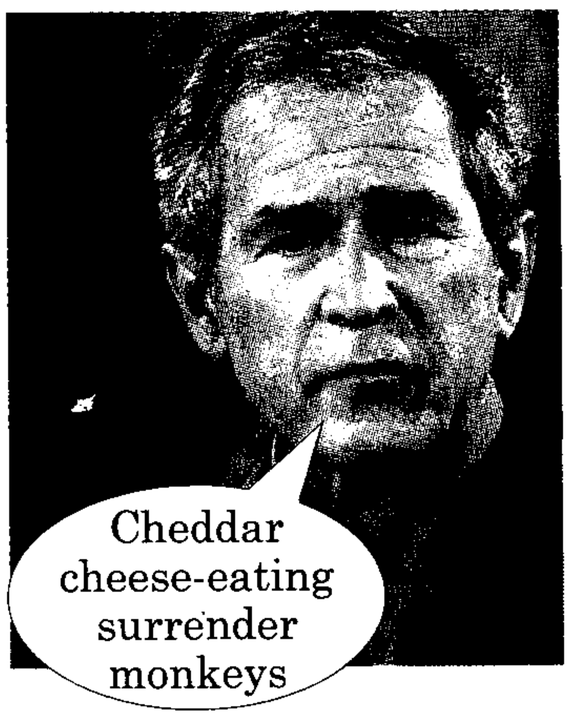
A NEW POEM

by Andrew Lord Motion, the Poet Laureate

Half a mile, half a mile, half a mile onward,
Out of the city of death
Drove the 500.
Mortars to the left of them,
Rockets to the right of them,
Volleyed and thundered.
Theirs not to reason why,
Theirs but to get to the airport and fly
Home as quickly as possible.
(Will this do? A.M.)

A vodcast of this poem read by Sir Ian McKellen can be downloaded from the Dally Telegraph at www.freeoneurostar.con

BUSH PRAISES BRITISH WITHDRAWAL



THOSE DUTIES BEING HANDED OVER TO THE IRAQI POLICE BY THE DEPARTING BRITISH ARMY IN BASRA IN FULL

- **Being killed by roadside bombs**
- **Being killed in mortar attacks**
- **Being killed by suicide bombers**
- **Err...**

That's it

WOUNDED-IN-ACTION man

Comes complete with:

✓ **No hospital facilities**
✓ **No compensation**
✓ **No recognition**

Price: Next to nothing.

WARNING

This product has been recalled because he is full of lead

"My dad said they had something similar in his day called hop-scotch"

A VERY INAPPROPRIATE PLACE FOR AN ANTONY GORMLEY

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam Luciano Pavarotti, Operatic Tenor

So. Farewell then
Luciano Pavarotti.

Yes, you were one
Of the Three Tenors
And now there are only
Two.

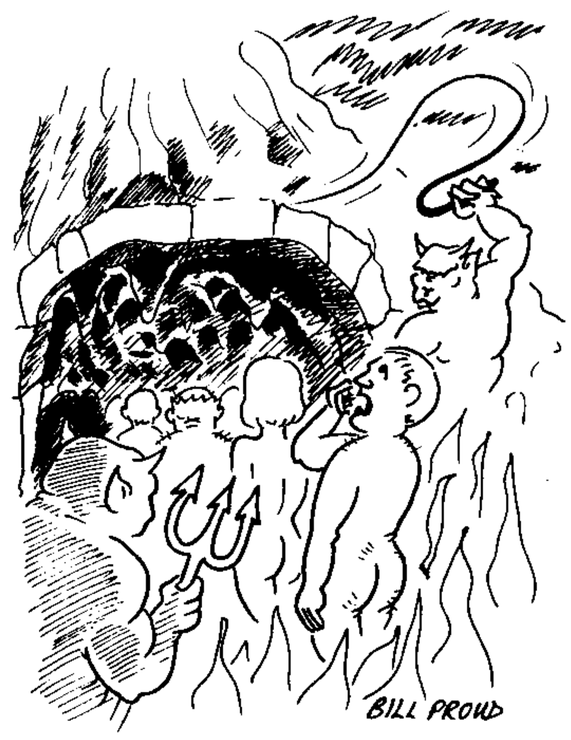
You were famous
For Hitting
Nine High Cs.
Now you have fallen victim
To the 'Big C'.

Nessun Dorma.
That was your biggest hit.
It means 'None shall
Sleep'.

Sadly, you are now
Sleeping forever.

All together now –
Da-da-da-dee-da-da
Da-da
Da-dee-da-dee
Da-da-da-da...

E. J. Thribb (17½ stone)



"I'm going into a tunnel"

EXCLUSIVE TO THE INDEPENDENT

Thribb Juvenilia Discovered

By Our Literary Staff
W.H. Auden

Some early poems by the celebrated poet E.J. Thribb have been discovered in the archive of Tooting Bec Comprehensive (formerly Tooting Bec Secondary Modern). The poems, originally published in the school magazine *The Tootingian,* have been greeted by scholars as a major literary find. Said Professor Phil Space, "These incredible verses show that even at 13½ Thribb has mastered the art of threnody to an extra-ordinary degree."

The Independent is to publish the poems in full in a special supplement with an introduction by Harold Pinter.

The poem we reprint today is thought to be the earliest "Thribbody" in existence.

Lines on the Retirement of J.P.L. Fieldgate

So. Farewell
Then
Mr Fieldgate.

You were
Our French Master.

"Bonjour, la
Classe",
That was your
Catchphrase.

But now it
Is a case
Of "Au Revoir".

(E.J. Thribb 13½)

IRB RUGBY WORLD CUP 2007 FRANCE

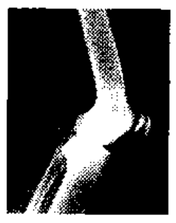
Six To Watch In The Rugby World Cup

Here they are – the top injuries which will dominate the tournament the whole world is talking about

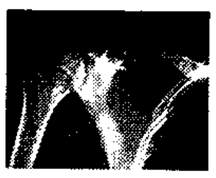
Jonny Wilkinson's ankle

It's back and it's more painful than ever!

Jonny Wilkinson's knee



Yet to make a big impact on the tournament, will it survive to face the Springboks?



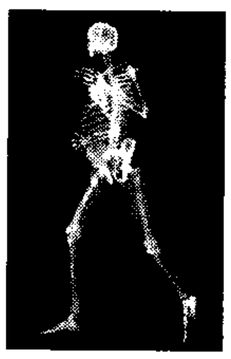
Jonny Wilkinson's shoulder

The pressure's on – or it will be when the Kiwis stamp on him.

Jonny Wilkinson's neck

A newcomer to the big injuries, but it could have a role to play in the final.

Jonny Wilkinson's everything else



Will probably dominate the headlines one way or another

(That's enough. Ed.)

School news

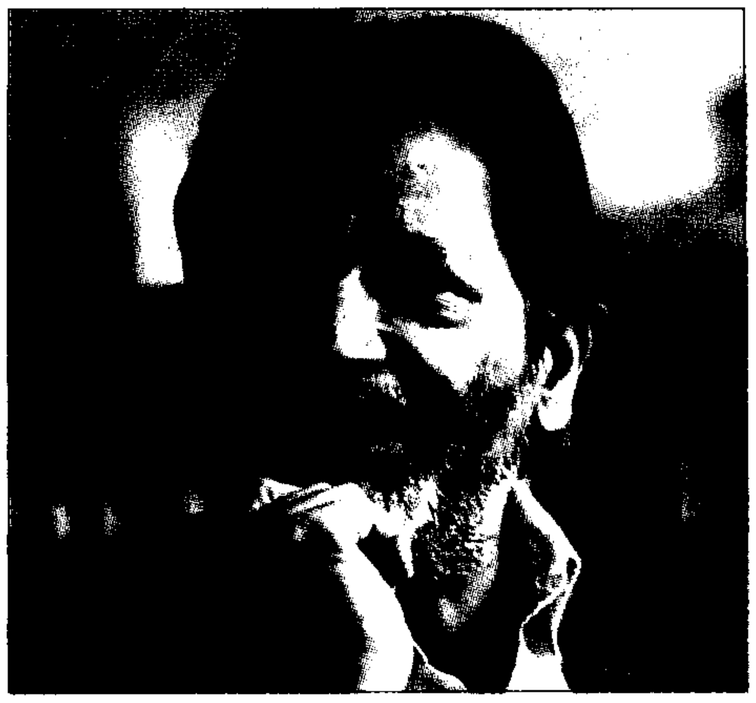
St Rice Cakes

Terracotta Term begins today. There are 4,000 warriors in the school *(Surely Chinese pupils? Ed.).* Hu Ja Fee (Tiananmens) is Head of League Tables. Ming Kam Bul is the oldest boy in the school. *(That's enough. Ed.)*

My Favourite Spoon
Beginners
Saturday 18 & Sunday 19 August
Studio, 10.30–16.30
V&A Courses

the PREMIERSH*TS
PAUL WOOLEY
IT'S A 'MUST WIN' GAME...
ENGLAND V. RUSSIA EURO QUALIFIER
IMAGINE THAT EMPTY FEELING IF WE DON'T REACH THE FINALS...
ENGLISH PUBS MADE £150M DURING LAST WORLD CUP

DIARY



V.S. NAIPAUL'S A-Z OF LITERATURE

Austen, Jane (1775-1817): Sadly, what small success she had didn't last. She never married, whereas I have been married twice. She is little read today, except by sodomites.

Blyton, Enid (1897-1968): True, The Famous Five are preferable to The Secret Seven, but, being English, both groups lack a third dimension. Enid Blyton never travelled down the Congo. She never exposed herself to anything. She never got her hands dirty. A lot of Swiss are like that too. Was she a lesbian?

Byron, Lord (1788-1824): Versifier and cripple, too flippant to last. He was not serious. In my own work, I have never permitted myself to settle for the easy rhyme.

Chatterton, Thomas (1752-70): Nothing comes of lying on your bed *all* day, playing dead.

Confucius (551- 479BC): Very Chinese, though he tried unsuccessfully to cover it up. Never trust a man with a beard.

Dickens, Charles (1812-1870): There's so much rubbish in Dickens. And he is wordy and repetitive. He uses far too many words, and he repeats himself. And he is wordy and repetitive. There's so much rubbish in Dickens.

Eliot, T.S. (1888-1965): His books only ever sold a few thousand copies. No-one reads him now, and he is dead. Is he still in print? I doubt it. Yet he enjoyed a modest reputation when he was alive.

Elizabeth II, Queen (1926-): She has ruthlessly pursued the path of fame and fortune. Sadly her reputation remains low. You can see the disappointment etched in her face. The last time I met her, she asked me if I had come far. It was the sort of mean, embittered comment for which she has become known.

Forster, E.M. (1879-1970): People don't actually read him, you know. He once had a reputation, but intelligent people now all agree that his work is utter rubbish.

Greene, Graham (1904- 91): Not a novelist that interests me.

Hergé (1907-1983): When all is said and done, Tintin is really a very poor reporter. He was a very flawed writer, with nothing to say. The man was a fraud. I do not for one minute believe that he went to the moon and back, and he had no understanding of the Incas. I once met his dog, Snowy. He told me he didn't like him either. A dreadful little man with a quiff. Was he a homosexual?

Ibsen, Henrik (1828-1906): Everybody knows that Norwegians have no natural sense of rhythm. He may have written many – far too many – plays, but Ibsen was an embarrassment on the dance-floor. I am only glad I was never married to him.

James, Henry (1843-1916): The worst writer in the world. He never went out. He never rolled up his sleeves and put his arm up the backside of a cow or slapped a woman about the face to teach her a lesson. It is an absence which shows in his so-called 'novels'.

Keats, John (1795-1821): Not a poet that interests me.

Longfellow, Henry Wadsworth (1807-82): Longfellow? Quite the reverse. The man was a midget.

Maid of Orleans (1412-1431): This is the name Joan of Arc gave herself. No-one else did. She was ruthlessly ambitious. She would do anything for immortality. It was she who built that bonfire, climbed up on it and and set light to it. A typical attention-seeker, with nothing to show for it. Very French.

Manning, Bernard (1930-2007) Philosopher.

Michelangelo (1475-1564): I used to think he was a great artist. But then I looked again at his work. To my horror, it showed no skill or originality whatsoever. I was so embarrassed on his behalf. The failure is extraordinary. It is not so surprising that since his death his reputation has been in free-fall.

Milton, John (1608-74): Paradise Lost is really very feeble and old-fashioned. It was fashionable once, but it sells really very few copies these days. A good writer wishing to pursue his craft should not succumb to blindness.

Naipaul, Sir V.S. (1932-): Our greatest living writer, whose fiction and non-fiction is characterised by a commitment to truth that gives it a unique brilliance. Winner of the Nobel Prize, his formidable body of work, full of gentleness, humanity and feeling, remains consistently undervalued by spineless nitwits.

Oxford English Dictionary: No narrative drive, no characterisation at all, and far too many words. What were they thinking of?

Paris: Not a city that interests me.

Pepys, Samuel (1633-1703): A forgotten diarist of little or no distinction.

Powell, Anthony (1905-2000): This is not an easy entry for me to write. I was the man's friend for many years. But the moment he died I found he had nothing more to say to me.

Proust, Marcel (1871-1922): Minor French novelist. Never knew when to stop.

Rembrandt van Rijn (1606-69): Fatally flawed. He only ever painted Dutch people. We are all agreed that they are not interesting.

Rushdie, Salman (1947-): Who? I have never heard of him.

Shakespeare, William (1564-1616): A minor playwright. By common consent, his plays do not stand the test of time. As a young man, I quite admired his overlong play called Hamlet. Struggling to read it again recently, I was struck by how dated it now seems. In time, the self-consciously 'universal' can seem desperately parochial.

Swallows and Amazons: Joseph Conrad described storms at sea much better than Arthur Ransome. Why do none of the Swallows and Amazons perish in agony? Instead, they all go home to bed. This demonstrates a failure of nerve by the author.

Tolstoy Leo (1828 – 1910): Not a writer that interests me. There is much more to life than war and peace, but he chose to ignore it.

Ulysses: What on earth was this uncouth Irishman Joyce on about? Wordy nonsense.

Vanity: A debilitating vice suffered by lesser novelists, but not by me, for which the entire English-speaking world is most grateful.

Wainwright, Alfred (1907-91): He wasted a lifetime on walking, but still never managed to get beyond the Lake District.

Xanadu: A revolting place, wholly uncivilised. With typical cowardice, Coleridge turned a blind eye to its seedy underbelly.

Zola, Emile (1840-1902). Not a novelist to interest anyone.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN

I'VE ALREADY HAD TO COMPLAIN ABOUT THE WAY WE'RE BEING TREATED AT HEATHROW COS OF SECURITY PROBLEMS..
AIRPORT SECURITY CHECKS
THIS IS OFFENSIVE, INTRUSIVE AND TOTALLY DEMEANING! I CAN'T BELIEVE THIS IS HAPPENING TO ME!
HOW DARE YOU TALK TO ME LIKE THAT? HOW DARE YOU TREAT ME LIKE THIS!!
SORRY, SIR, BUT RULES ARE RULES...
ALL I SAID WAS: DID YOU PACK YOUR LUGGAGE YOURSELF...?
OF COURSE NOT! DON'T YOU KNOW WHO I AM?

Literary Review

WHAT YOU DIDN'T MISS, Pt 94

The Mitfords: Letters Between Six Sisters

Charlotte Mosley (Ed.)
(4th Estate, £25)

Nancy to Diana, 4 July 1925

Darling Honks,

Having a frabjous time down at Swinners*. Fruity and Wog** are here and everything is simply too killing, darling. There was a bit of an awkward moment when Farve shot a gamekeeper – you know how "pushing" the working classes are becoming these days – but happily Ye Ancient Retainer was just divine about it and said he was proud to have his blood (of which there was rather a lot – don't get squeamish, Nard) shed by a gentleman, so that was all right.

Much love always, darling,

Naunce

* *Their country house at Swinbrook, Gloucestershire*

** *Possibly Sir Wogan Cavendish-Dilke-Fortescue (1873–1945), landowner and drunk*

Unity to Jessica, 1 April 1936

Dearest Corpse-Chafer,

Berlin is awfully splendid. The Badger* has found me this jolly flat, previously tenanted by some Jewish people who had the misfortune to fall under a train. Too gamboge** of him, I thought. Do tell Debo that the lamp-shades are made out of real human skin, which must have cost a fortune. Goebbels, whom I don't think you've met, has been too sweet and comes round every evening to play Canasta.

Must go now darling as I have bayonet practice at 6.

Ever your loving Bobo

* *Hitler*

** *From Krapisch, the Mitford private language, meaning "good-natured"*

Deborah to Diana, 19 May 1942

Darling Nardy,

Thanks frightfully for the Heavener hankers* – the lady who blows my nose for me was simply *prostrate*. I forgive you being a Fascist for that.

Hope prison isn't too awful darling. Everybody is being terribly grim about you being a traitor, but I tell them all not to be so beastly to my poor Nard.

Best love, Debo.

* *Apparently the gift of a set of matching handkerchiefs*

Jessica to Pamela, 13 January 1958

Look here Woo,

It is simply too vile and *foul* of you to suggest that I stole Muv's photo album in order to illustrate that *Life* magazine article "Why Two of My Sisters Were Nazi Loonies" and you must consider us on non-speakers herewith.

Decca

Diana to Deborah, 25 February 1988

Darling Debo,

Such a beastly review of the Betj book in the *Sunday Times* by that ghastly little man Carey, saying he was vindictive, snobbish and disloyal. A nobler, funnier man never lived. Could anyone honestly believe that when he wrote that poem about "The working classes smell/I'm sure they'll go to hell" he wasn't making a joke? The more wonderful you are the more you are resented, it seems to me.

Had a delightfully understanding phone call from Andrew [Wilson] which was too good of him. Agreed with me that he couldn't see why everyone was still so interested in us. Just a set of poor, country girls, growing up in the middle of nowhere with Muv and Farve and no money to speak, never knowing what would become of us, not in the least interested in publicity or grand events, but simply *hounded* by the newspapers... [*continues for hundreds of pages*]

BOOKS & BOOKMEN

■ THE trend of books page editors having to review authors' works while at the same time plugging festivals or events sponsored by their paper where the same authors will be appearing can have awkward ramifications.

Often a book is only reviewed, or reviewed so prominently, to drum up ticket sales. This can lead to the nightmare scenario of a novelist giving a reading at, say, the *Times* Cheltenham Festival to an audience which has just read a hostile review of his or her novel in the paper.

The usual way round this conundrum is to pick an amiable critic; but that's not what the *Observer* did when it commissioned Peter Conrad to write a lead review on Germaine Greer's *Shakespeare's Wife* on 2 September.

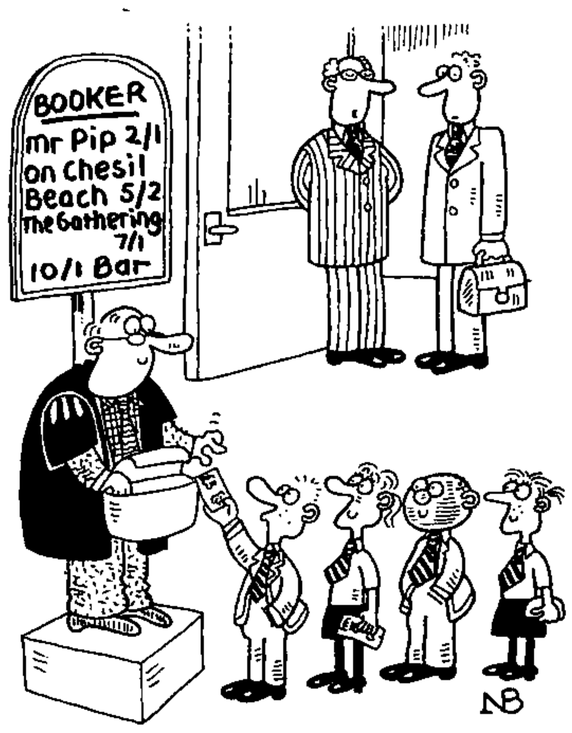
He duly handed in a demolition job, calling the book a "maenadic outing" by a writer who "has never seemed to me exactly level-headed". Conrad accused Greer of vengefully "emasculating" Shakespeare to "satisfy her own grudge against men", and ended by dismissing the work as being informed by "motiveless paranoia".

The review was accompanied by news that "Germaine Greer will be talking about *Shakespeare's Wife* at an *Observer*/Blackwell event this Wednesday".

■ "RARELY have I read a book that so cries out to be made into a movie," gushed Andrew Roberts in the *Mail on Sunday* about James Delingpole's D-Day pot-boiler, *Coward on the Beach*.

Making a rare appearance as a fiction expert, the pocket historian continued: "The book is clearly written with a sequel in mind... and a good thing too."

No doubt it was a disinterested assessment and entirely unrelated to the ecstatic praise of the *Catholic Herald* critic who called Roberts' *History of the English-Speaking Peoples since 1900* a "masterpiece" and the work of "one of the most astoundingly insightful and original historians of his age". The reviewer? One James Delingpole.



"Pennyfeather makes literature really come alive"

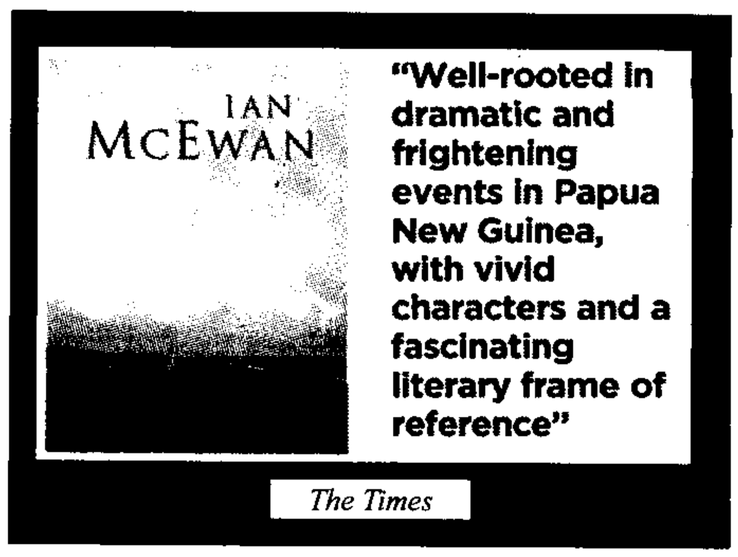
BOOKS & BOOKERMEN

■ IT'S always a risk not to have an English professor on the Booker panel.

This lack of specialist expertise can be significant. In this year's shortlist, for example, Mohsin Hamid's well-fancied *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* is a monologue by a Pakistani ex-Wall Street whizzkid, and clearly owes much in form (as a publishing insider party-poopingly murmured at the shortlist bash) to Camus' *The Fall*.

Should it win, mutterings are inevitable. It could even be a re-run of 1996, when Graham Swift won with *Last Orders* – only to have the finger pointed a year later over parallels with a Faulkner novel that the judges, led by Carmen Callil, had apparently not recognised. In that year too there was no English prof on the panel.

'Bookworm'


IAN
McEWAN
"Well-rooted in dramatic and frightening events in Papua New Guinea, with vivid characters and a fascinating literary frame of reference"
The Times

BRITISH forces in southern Afghanistan have captured the Taliban leader directing operations against them in the Sangin area, the Ministry of Defence said last night.

Naim Atallah was reported to have been responsible for

The Sunday Times

PULP NON-FICTION

The books, the sheikh, the writs and his lawyer...

IN APRIL 2006, Cambridge University Press published a scholarly tome called *Alms for Jihad: Charity and Terrorism in the Islamic World*, by J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins. Sales were slow; but now they're even slower. Anyone wanting to buy a copy through Amazon will find this plaintive message: "Currently unavailable. We don't know when or if this item will be back in stock."

Last month, after being threatened with a libel writ by the Saudi billionaire Sheikh Khalid bin Mahfouz, CUP issued a grovelling apology, pulped all remaining copies and asked libraries around the world to remove the title from their shelves.

What caused the trouble was the book's reference to a charity called the Muwafaq ("Blessed Relief") Foundation, which in October 2001 was accused by the US treasury department of having transferred funds to al-Qaeda. The authors noted that it was Khalid bin Mahfouz who founded the charity in the early 1990s and provided most of its $20m endowment – but, as they also noted, this doesn't mean that he knowingly sponsored terrorism. Mahfouz says that despite being the principal donor, he "was not involved in the running of the charity". Nevertheless, the very mention of his name in such a book, even though he wasn't accused of backing terrorism, was enough to spur his lawyers into action.

Unusually, the threat of litigation was directed merely at the publisher, not the authors. Burr and Collins, respectively a former USAID relief coordinator in Sudan and a history professor in California, have publicly dissociated themselves from CUP's settlement with the sheikh. But they sympathise with the Press's predicament: how can an academic publisher with tiny profit margins withstand a legal onslaught from a billionaire? As Collins concedes, given the bias of British libel law in favour of the plaintiff, it was "probably the cheapest way out".

Other publishers have reached the same conclusion. In August 2006, Profile books published Matthew Carr's *Unknown Soldiers: How Terrorism Transformed the Modern World*, to largely enthusiastic reviews. Since January this too has been unobtainable: Profile pulped it after receiving a minatory letter from Khalid bin Mahfouz's lawyers. In March 2004, following a similar letter, Pluto Press agreed to pulp Michael Griffin's *Reaping the Whirlwind: The Taliban Movement in Afghanistan*. At the same time Mahfouz's lawyers persuaded Random House to abandon its plan to publish Craig Unger's American bestseller *House of Bush, House of Saud*. Random House's deputy chairman, Simon Master, complained that the expense of fighting a libel suit would be "vastly more than the publisher could hope to earn from the book".

And it isn't only British publishers: other titles to incur Mahfouz's litigious attentions over the past couple of years include *Forbidden Truth: US-Taliban Secret Oil Diplomacy and the Failed Hunt for Bin Laden* by the French writers Jean-Charles Brisard and Guillaume Dasqué, and *Funding Evil: How Terrorism is Financed and How to Stop It* by the American author Rachel Ehrenfeld. Neither of these books had a British publisher, yet the sheikh sued them in London on the grounds that a few copies of the US editions had made their way into this country via Amazon orders.

Is he exploiting Britain's notorious libel laws to suppress books abroad, knowing he would stand little chance of success if he sued in the country of publication? Mahfouz's reply to the accusation of "libel tourism" came in a letter to the *Times* two years ago from his spokesman, Jeddah-based lawyer Cherif Sedky: "For those who have homes, business interests and reputations in the UK, the ability to vindicate their reputation here [*sic*] is... essential. English law already provides ample safeguards to weed out cases and claimants with no real UK connection."

How English is Mahfouz, then? His own website, which also has a long section headed "litigation", gives this potted biography: "Born in 1949, Khalid bin Mahfouz is the second son of Salem bin Mahfouz (d.1994), the founder of the National Commercial Bank of Saudi Arabia. He was born in and is a citizen and resident of Saudi Arabia."

Even so, he could hardly have less of a "UK connection" than some of the people he sues. The libel lawyer David Hooper, who acted for Jean-Charles Brisard in the 2005 case, gave this neat summary: "A Saudi businessman has obtained an English libel ruling against a French author on the American edition of a book where UK rights were specifically excluded."

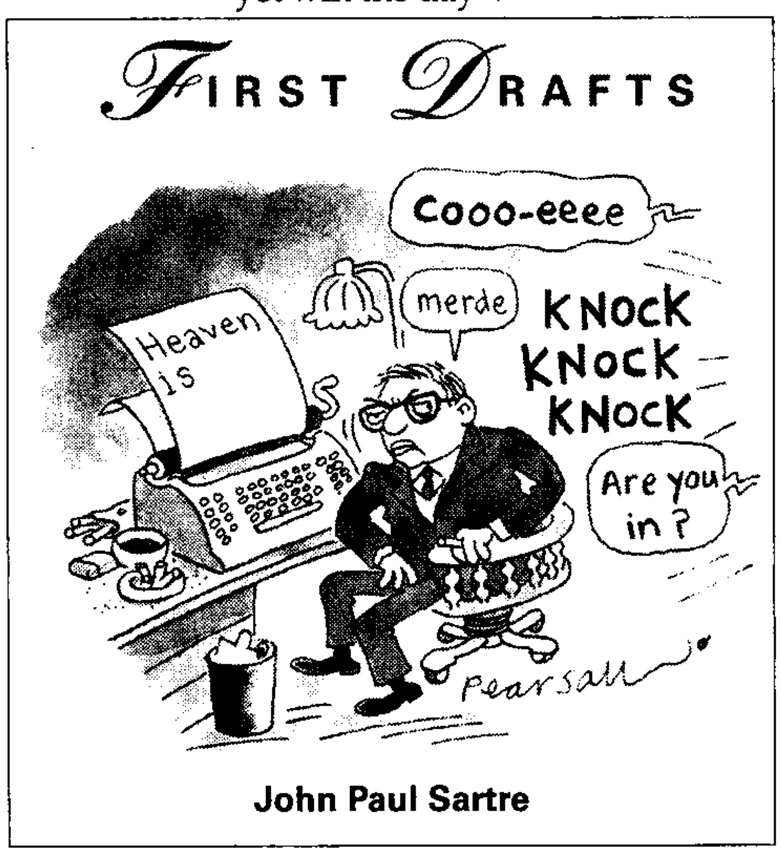
The case against Rachel Ehrenfeld was equally absurd. A mere 23 copies of *Funding Evil* reached Britain – but this was enough for Mahfouz's energetic solicitors, Kendall Freeman, to swing into action. Ehrenfeld, who runs the American Center for Democracy, refused to acknowledge "a British court's jurisdiction over a book published here" and didn't enter a defence. The high court then ruled in Mahfouz's favour by default, ordering Ehrenfeld to apologise and destroy all unsold copies.

Now, however, the tables are turned. Ehrenfeld has sued Mahfouz in a New York federal court, claiming that his default judgment in London "is unenforceable in the United States and repugnant to the First Amendment". Hearings begin this autumn in what has been described as "a pivotal case involving the clash between First Amendment rights and foreign libel rulings".

The British don't seem to share this American passion for free speech. Not a single British newspaper reported Cambridge University Press's recent capitulation over *Alms For Jihad*. But it has provoked outrage in the US, which fought a war of independence more than 200 years ago to free itself from transatlantic diktats. The American Library Association has advised its members to ignore CUP's demand that they return the book, pointing out that the British settlement "is unenforceable in the United States... Given the intense interest in the book, and the desire of readers to learn about the controversy firsthand, we recommend that US libraries keep the book available for their users".

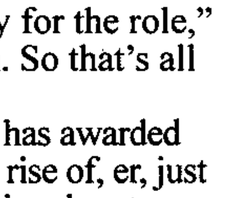
The interest is certainly intense: a couple of weeks ago, after CUP pulped the rest of the print-run, a copy of *Alms For Jihad* sold on eBay for $538. The authors say they have had "several offers from US publishers" who want to reissue it, prompting the *San Francisco Chronicle* to hope that "free speech may yet win the day".

Don't bet on it. If even one copy of the new US edition somehow finds its way to these shores, the high court can expect yet another visit from the sheikh's ever-vigilant lawyers. Never mind the war against terrorism: isn't it time Britain joined the war against libel tourism?



John Paul Sartre

HIGH PRINCIPALS



DANIEL KHAN, principal of Grimsby Institute of Further and Higher Education (formerly known as plain old Grimsby College) has been on a recruiting spree this summer.

In July the institute took on a new "business analyst to the principal and chief executive" in the shape of one Matthew Khan, the principal's son. The job was advertised with a salary of £20-£22,000. At the same time, Matthew Khan's fiancée, Claire Thompson, was recruited as a sports development officer (salary: £16-£18,000).

The institute said there had been a rigorous selection process for the posts. "No applicant is given any form of favoritism and appointments are made purely on the individual's ability and suitability for the role," said a spokeswoman. So that's all right, then.

Meanwhile Khan has awarded himself a modest pay rise of, er, just 23.5 percent, taking his salary to £126,000 this year, all the while refusing to implement the national pay scales agreed between the Association of Colleges and the staff unions.

BAE Systems like to hand out awards to engineering graduates as part of its attempts to "make friends and influence people".

To this end, Tom Watson was one of two BAE winners from his class at Loughborough University, receiving a £100 cheque for "most improved student". However, Watson was also the most angry student during his time at Loughborough, angry about the sway the arms firm has at his university, which has accepted millions from BAE. He told *Private Eye*: "The influence of BAE over the course was pretty heavy, the steering committee was BAE dominated, the studies were often BAE oriented. Engineers can do a lot more with their skills than just help the arms trade."

Watson can also do a lot with his award. He has donated the money, which came on an official BAE Systems cheque, to the Campaign Against the Arms Trade to fund its research into the influence of BAE and other "defence" firms at British unis.

Private Eye's Worstselling Celebrity Memoirs

Position	Author	Title	Publisher	Sales to date
1	Elaine Lordan (Eastenders)	*Whatever It Takes*	Ebury	4,173
2	Toyah Willcox	*Diary Of A Facelift*	Michael O'Mara	4,678
3	Claire King (Emmerdale)	*Confessions Of A Bad Girl*	John Blake	5,732
4	David Gest	*Simply The Gest*	Headline	6,477
5	Patsy Palmer	*All Of Me*	Hodder	9,901

Pseuds Corner

Dear Mrs Harrington,

Many thanks for coming to this year's summer exhibition. The decision to award Gavin Turk the Wollaston award was made by an independent panel of judges, Matthew Collings, Ekow Eshun, Victoria Miro and Bill Woodrow RA.

Woodrow said that 'Dumb Candle is an imaginative work with subtle undertones that pick up on several significant art historical moments. The simple candle form is one of the oldest symbols of life. There was a long and serious debate about the winner which was resolved in a unanimous decision.'

Letter from the Royal Academy of Arts in defence of the prize-winning exhibit 'Dumb Candle', a six-inch candle mounted on a small stand

It's the palette of my referential experience.

ANNIE LENNOX on her music,
Radio Times

MY FAVOURITE OUTFIT:
Barnaby Tydman, 21, Poet

'I've always been a poet' says Barnaby. 'It's everything, really. Life is a long poem.' He loves hearing his words set to music by his band, Rose-Trip Slang, and thinks the best poets are musicians these days. 'It's magical when your words and music work together. It reaffirms your belief in happy endings.' As for clothes, 'They're an expression of your feelings. They should be like a poem, too. Maybe some people don't have a lot to say, but you should capture your essence in your clothes.' Barnaby's heroes are Dylan Thomas, Baudelaire, Rimbaud and the Zimbabwean author Dambudzo Marechera.

Bandana 'I like smugglers and gypsies. Chavs are their descendents. I think they're romantic heroes. The scarf is actually my mum's. I like the tropical colours.

Rings 'I grew up on the Thames. Every year they drain it around Twickenham and that's where I found this ring on the river bed. I like to imagine it belonged to Ophelia.

Rose 'The rose is like crumpled money; money is like crumpled roses. Like an expensive bruise. I got this one at Norwich station.

Money 'As a kid my mum would give me money for the arcade. I wouldn't spend it because it was cherished and I'd just look at it and it would become meaningful.

Boots 'I'm obsessed by Goths at the moment. The surrealist writers were the first Goths and so were the Romantics, so Goths are really cool. [*continues*]

Observer Magazine

Pseuds Corporate

Benefit Crystallisation Event

A benefit crystallisation event is the new term for drawing benefits from a pension scheme.

Wintertur newsletter

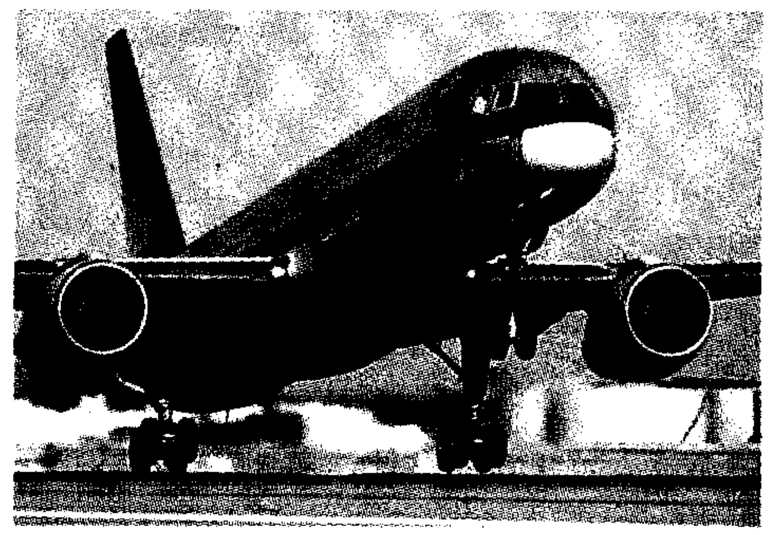
CONTRIBUTORS: Mrs Unity Harrington, Tony Hammond, Arnold Verrall, Barbara Langley.

£10 paid for all entries

IN THE BACK

AIRCRAFT FUMES

The secret life of BAe



WHILE the aviation industry has consistently denied that it is poisoning pilots and passengers by exposing them to highly toxic engine oil fumes, it has emerged that British Aerospace (BAe), the British arms and aircraft giant, bought the silence of two airlines which were alleging just such leaks.

Two former Australian airlines, Ansett and EWA, had launched a legal action claiming a design fault meant that BAe's 146 aircraft were producing "obnoxious oil and other fumes" in "some or all of the cabins". While BAe denied liability, it agreed to pay out Aus$750,000 and help the two airlines in a separate claim against Allied Signal, now the US aviation company Honeywell, which produced the components said to be leaking oil. Allied Signal also subsequently paid out to settle the claim with a US$1,235,000 credit for the relevant parts and labour.

Both deals contained secrecy clauses prohibiting disclosure – extraordinary in an industry where issues relating to safety and health should be paramount. The documents raise serious questions about whether BAe secretly bought off other airlines around the world or whether it simply kept them in the dark.

Although the secret deals were done 14 years ago, copies of them, passed to the *Eye*, have just been tabled in the Australian senate amid allegations that the senate was seriously misled by members of the airline industry seven years ago when it looked into the issue of toxic fumes and ill-health among sick pilots and air crew.

BAe said at the time that the number of pilots and crew reporting symptoms indicated that there was a "health issue", but the "leap from having a general health issue back to the fact that there is a fundamental problem with either oil or this aircraft is not backed up by any kind of evidence."

As *Eye* readers will be aware, BAe's 146, along with Boeing's 757, are the two main culprits now being blamed for leaks of highly toxic fumes containing organophosphates, carcinogens and known immuno-suppressants into the cabin. Organophosphates (OPs) build up in the body and attack the nervous system, causing a range of symptoms from short term nausea, headaches and dizziness to longer term cognitive neurological and respiratory problems and serious brain damage.

Potential problems are not restricted to these two jets. Anyone who flies is said to be at risk because of a cost-cutting decision taken in the industry 40 years ago to "bleed" air off from the engines and cool it before piping it into the cabins for people to breathe instead of taking in a separate fresh supply. Incredibly, there is no filter and no system for monitoring cabin air quality, even though most jet engine oils comprise a lethal cocktail including OPs and a nasty compound called tricresyl phosphate (TCP), an anti-wear additive. Warnings about TCP constituents say they are a major hazard to human health and have been known about for decades. There is no safe level of ingestion.

Two former pilots whose careers and health have been wrecked following exposure to contaminated air on flights have teamed up to make a hard-hitting documentary, *Welcome Aboard Toxic Airlines*, to be premiered later this year. It accuses the industry, watchdogs and governments of a massive cover-up. It features many disturbing interviews with crews and passengers around the world who say they have been left disabled by known contaminated air incidents. Some have successfully sued their employers.

One Swedish pilot described how in 1999 he and his co-pilot were suddenly incapacitated with nausea and temporary paralysis during a flight. Neils Gomer just managed to reach for oxygen in time to regain control of his BAe 146. "I am like paralysed," he said. "But what would have happened if we did not regain control of ourselves and the aircraft, if we had passed out…

The aircraft would have crashed. What would the investigation say? Probably pilot error." The engine on his flight was subsequently found to be covered in oil.

The documentary highlights another incident on an American Airbus 320 16 months ago, where air was contaminated and pilots resorted to oxygen masks. The three flight attendants have been off work with neurological problems ever since. No one checked to see if health problems beset any passengers on the flight.

The documentary, which reveals how a similar pattern of ill health is emerging on oil rigs which use jet engines as a power supply, is the work of Tristan Loraine, a 45-year-old former 757 pilot, and former Qantas pilot Susan Michaelis, 44 (pictured). She began her campaign after she was forced to retire aged 34. It led to the first official inquiry into bad air by the Australian senate. Loraine, shortly after organising a two-day conference in 2005 that brought together world experts on the subject of cabin fumes, suddenly went from being an ultra-fit tri-athlete to feeling exhausted and debilitated. TCP was found in his blood. The irony is that Loraine and Michaelis's employers had to accept medical reports saying they are not fit to fly because they have been exposed to neuro-toxins while continuing to refuse to accept any responsibility for that exposure.

After hearing the testimony of experts from around the globe, the Australian senate concluded that chemicals can indeed "be an important factor in an aircraft's safe and comfortable operation," and that excessive levels of chemical contamination can effect both cockpit and cabin, "a fact apparent to airline operators, to air crew and to every airline passenger."

That was seven years ago. The Australians deferred to the regulators, including the Civil Aviation Authority and the industry which funds them, and they all remain in denial. They say there is "little scientific evidence" to support any link, and that air quality studies (funded by the industry) show that cabin air quality is as good as in offices.

In the UK, for more than three years now the matter has been in the hands of the Committee on Toxicity (CoT). In what appears to be an eerie re-run of the scandal of thousands of farmers being poisoned by OP pesticides (*Eyes passim*), the committee again appears reluctant to get to grips with the issue of TCPs. Honeywell and BAe (now going by the name of BAE Systems) gave evidence recently to the CoT but the minutes make

no mention of the earlier court deals.

Susan Michaelis has now put together a comprehensive 800-page dossier of evidence from around the world . The *Aviation Contaminated Air Reference Manual* lists many hundreds of incidents of contaminated air reported by pilots to the UK database between 1985 and last year, but believed to be a fraction of the real number. It also lists independent research findings from toxicologists, epidemiologists, neuro-scientists and other experts raising questions about cabin air quality and ill health. CoT declined to hear from Michaelis.

Recently, with colleagues from the newly formed international Global Cabin Air Quality Executive, representing nearly 500,000 aircrew worldwide, she wrote to Ruth Kelly, the UK's Transport Secretary, to point out no fewer than 24 inaccuracies in CoT's latest "draft" report. Last week the department responded. It ignored every point raised and simply refuted the claim that CoT was biased in favour of the industry.

Last year the *Eye* reported on the latest study to support claims of "aerotoxic syndrome", a clinical study of 27 pilots carried out by University College London. It found they were suffering chronic health problems similar to OP poisoning, including extreme fatigue, dizziness, headaches, numbness in their fingers and toes and memory loss. They reported mixing up or being unable to retain vital numerical data about altitude, speed and direction. Dr Sarah Mackenzie Ross, a clinical neuro-psychologist, also reported high levels of nickel and of volatile organic compounds in their blood and body fats, including organophosphates. From data of recorded fume incidents , she estimated that up to 200,000 passengers on UK flights could have been exposed to noxious fumes in 2004 alone. CoT says her study is too small to prove anything. So has the Department of Transport commissioned a larger controlled study? It seems not.

Most meaningful research is being left to unions, campaigners and the Australian military. Research is underway in the US to devise blood tests to pinpoint exposure to OPs in the oils. In addition, pilots around the world have been secretly taking swabs from aircraft, the majority of which are said to be testing positively for traces of TCP. Finally, a survey of 242 past and present BAe 146 pilots shortly to be published by the University of New South Wales is expected to show that eight out of 10 had experienced contaminated air, more than six out of 10 had suffered short term symptoms and about a quarter claimed long term effects.

None of this proves a link; but the mounting evidence and growing number of experts who are voicing their concerns raises the question of why the industry is not fitting filters and alarms and why it is not switching to jet engine oils that do not contain TCPs, which have been available for more than 30 years.

Interestingly, Boeing is now producing a new aircraft, the 787, which will pump fresh air into the cockpits and cabins and not bleed it from the engines. Perhaps, as with the sheep dip scandal of the 1990s, the industry will quietly clean up its act for the future and make no admission about the past. Too bad for those poisoned in the meantime.

Number crunchings

36.8% ■ Number of skilled migrants government estimates would not pass new English test – equivalent to GCSE C grade or above

47.8% ■ Number of students in UK who did not pass GCSE English at C grade or above

GOVERNMENT WASTE

New Bourn lamb?

EVEN when he is stuck at home in Britain, globe-trotting National Audit Office chief Sir John Bourn (*Eyes passim*) still manages to live it up at taxpayers' expense, the *Eye* has discovered.

A freedom of information request reveals that from 2004/05 to 2006/07 Sir John entertained "UK contacts" at London's restaurants no fewer than 160 times, at an average cost of £154 a throw. He also hosted 20 meals for visiting delegations of overseas auditors on 40 occasions at £1,287 each and three events at NAO conferences costing £41,817.

As he spends so many months abroad every year, and some guests presumably reciprocate his hospitality, Sir John (pictured) must be grazing in the capital's eateries more often than most restaurant critics (with the added luxury of being ferried to and fro in a chauffeur-driven car). An *average* £154 a time would buy a very agreeable meal for two, while an endless round of têtes-à-têtes is certainly a novel way for a scrupulously incorruptible public auditor to do business.

The NAO even has its own private dining rooms – not a luxury afforded elsewhere in government – in its Buckingham Palace Road, Victoria HQ. Bizarrely for a spending watchdog, it can't say how much in total it costs to run them. Senior staff host more 200 visitors a year, bringing in outside caterers for an average £92 a time.

So can humble taxpayers expect some accounting for Sir John's extra spending around the West End? Not from the unaccountable NAO. Disclosing who enjoyed Sir John's hospitality would, according to corporate affairs director Jill Goldsmith, breach the data protection act – an unlikely claim given that Number Ten has been forced to reveal the names of those entertained by Tony Blair at Chequers.

Even admitting the venues would, says Ms Goldsmith, "impede [Sir John's] ability to engage freely with external stakeholders" (*"steak-eaters", shurely? Ed*). Nothing, of course, to do with the embarrassment that would be caused by revealing the top restaurants at which the man charged with keeping tabs on public spending chooses to blow taxpayers' cash.

Meanwhile the NAO continues to water-down findings and look on the bright side of the most dubious performance. In recent months it has managed to give ringing endorsements on subjects ranging from the Financial Services Authority, whose approach it describes as "very proportionate" despite a lamentable record on nailing financial crime, to the Olympics – on which its latest report described the multiplying budget as a "significant step forward" without criticising the woeful original figures.

Could Olympics and FSA bosses have been among the hundreds of "UK contacts" schmoozed by Sir John? And which other government bodies might have emerged rather well from an NAO review after their boss shared a meal and a bottle of something agreeable with the auditor-general?

MISCARRIAGE OF JUSTICE

No-murder mystery

THE strange case of Englishman Kevin Sweeney (pictured), jailed in the Netherlands in 2001 for a murder that almost certainly never was, casts a dismal light on the nation that hosts the International Court of Justice.

For six years it appears the Dutch authorities weren't convinced there had been a murder either. Suzanne Davies, Sweeney's wife of seven months, died in a fire in the early hours of 16 July 1995, in a house they were renovating in Steensel, near the Belgian border. Sweeney had left to drive to their other home in Brussels, where his daughter from a previous marriage was ill. Although the time he set off was in dispute, one neighbour reported seeing his car leave about an hour-and-a-half before the fire was spotted at 3.41am. When fire crews arrived the house was firmly locked from the inside.

Davies was found unconscious in the smoke-filled dressing room next to the bedroom, where a fire had taken hold at the foot of the bed. She died later from burns and smoke inhalation. Cigarettes were found beside the partially fire-damaged bed, but police were suspicious about turpentine and other potential accelerants found – items Sweeney maintained were there to clean up after the decorators.

An hour earlier, the burglar alarm in the Steensel house had been activated and police arrived along with the Sweeney's cleaning lady, who was a key holder. They had found the house secure, seen nothing suspicious and had left.

Sweeney was arrested some five months after the tragedy, in December 1995. He was interrogated for more than 200 hours, without a lawyer, on allegations of fraud, arson and murder, but refused to sign incriminating statements. In what was taken as an indication that he would be acquitted, Sweeney was released from custody the day after his trial started in September 1996. And indeed he was cleared of all charges by a unanimous decision of the three judges (there is no jury trial in the Netherlands).

The prosecution had little to suggest arson other than a smell of turpentine in the room and traces on the bedroom carpet. It could offer nothing to explain how Sweeney could have left the house and been so far away when the fire was spotted. Under Dutch law, however, the prosecution can appeal against an acquittal, and more than three years later Sweeney suddenly found himself ordered back to court. The basis for the new trial were contentious forensic tests that showed that a flashover – a sudden eruption of flames triggered by the use of fire accelerants – could have accounted for the damage in the room.

Sabine Zanker, of Fair Trials Abroad, said the retrial was extraordinary. The president of the court called Sweeney's lawyers 14 days before the hearing to suggest there was no need to call defence witnesses nor any need for prosecution witnesses to be cross-examined – leading the defence to believe his acquittal would stand. So without witnesses being cross-examined nor evidence tested, and without any explanation of how he escaped the house, Sweeney was convicted.

His first appeal on no less than 12 points of law to the Dutch supreme court failed. A subsequent application to the European Court of Human Rights, alleging multiple breaches of his rights to freedom and a fair trial, was rejected on the grounds that he had not exhausted the Dutch system. That included claims that vital forensic evidence had been suppressed; that the fire tests were flawed; that witnesses had been pressured and coerced; that the hearings were unfair and partial; and that there was insufficient evidence to convict anyone, let alone Sweeney.

His case has now been taken up by a leading criminal lawyer, Professor Geert Jan Knoops, of the University of Utrecht, and his team, who are preparing a fresh appeal to the Dutch supreme court. He told the *Eye* the conviction rests solely on the highly disputable assumption of a flashover. But reopening cases in the Netherlands is not easy. How much longer will Sweeney have to wait in jail until he gets that hearing?

In the Back continues overleaf ➤

IRAQ

Doctor who?

WITH security the most pressing issue for the government of Iraq, who better to advise prime minister Nouri al-Maliki than national security adviser Mowaffak al-Rubaie (pictured) – a man once reprimanded by the UK's General Medical Council for serious professional misconduct?

Before becoming a key official in post-Saddam Iraq, al-Rubaie worked as a doctor in Britain, living in London throughout the 1980s and 1990s. He was also a spokesman for Da'Wa, the Islamist party opposed to Saddam, and he returned to Iraq in 2003 to serve on the Governing Council. His misdemeanours in Britain have only just come to light because when he was here he worked under the anglicised name of Dr Mow Baker.

It was as Dr Baker that in 2001 al-Rubaie was the director of a locum agency. And it was in that year that the General Medical Council (GMC) reprimanded him for trying to hide the fact that a psychiatrist, Leonard Marinovich, whom he was trying to place with a hospital was under investigation for sexual misbehaviour with female patients. Dr Marinovich was later struck off for his "massage" of patients with depression.

According to the GMC, al-Rubaie wrote to a consultant psychiatrist regarding a job reference he had provided for Dr Marinovich. In its findings it said: "In that letter you made an inappropriate request by asking... to avoid mentioning Dr Marinovich's involvement in disciplinary proceedings before a committee of the General Medical Council." Only by covering up the investigation could al-Rubaie's agency have placed Dr Marinovich and earned its fees.

The GMC found that al-Rubaie "allowed your personal interests to override those of your professional responsibilities. Your actions violated the trust placed in you as a director of a medical locum employment agency by hospital trusts". Although the disciplinary committee decided this was "serious professional misconduct", because it believed "the true position" about Dr Marinovich would have emerged and because al-Rubaie had "shown regret" and was of "previous good history", he was only reprimanded.

Al-Rubaie's party, Da'Wa, follows strict Islamic theology, so his involvement in covering up sexual misbehaviour for financial gain is embarrassing. Moreover, the revelation of his reprimand may add to general discontent with the Iraqi government. Three members of a US congressional delegation who returned from Iraq in August expressed extreme disquiet about al–Rubaie. According to the *Washington Post*, when he briefed the delegates, he was watching a large flat-panel TV on his desk which was showing children's cartoons. When the Americans asked him to turn it off he apparently replied: "But this is my favourite television show."

Military escort

THE more up-market private security firms in Iraq, desperate to distance themselves from the "dogs of war" mercenary image, formed a shiny new trade association to reflect their role as respectable contractors. But in their anxiety to be seen as squeaky clean, the tough guys have been behaving like a lot of big girls' blouses dealing with the advances of a solitary Atlanta-based escort called "Tori" (pictured).

The Private Security Company Association of Iraq (PSCAI) includes all the main players – Tim Spicer's Aegis, Malcolm Rifkind's Armor Group, America's Blackwater, Olive, Hart Group, Global and others. Registration is designed to drive cowboy operators out of town and smooth the way for acceptable regulation of the private soldiers. So far, so reputable. But the hard men got in a terrible knot when an American prostitute planning a visit to the Green Zone offered her services exclusively to their members – and included their logo (pictured) on her website as a sign of her bona fides.

Last month, when "Tori of Atlanta" advertised her forthcoming trip to Baghdad, the "petite and mature provider" assured potential customers she was a "bundle of sensuality" and said she would be "entertaining all members of the Private Military Company community registered with the PSCAI" from a "secured compound" inside the Green Zone.

She added: "My apologies but at this time I am UNABLE to plan any meetings w/ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY. (The members of Private Military

Company community has [sic] an exclusive arrangement during this visit.)" Tori clearly understands that regular soldiers could face charges of consorting with prostitutes if they used her services, but mercenaries are not so restricted.

The PSCAI, which is paid to make war and not love, went ballistic. Internal emails from PSCAI boss Lawrence T. Peter, a Bible-carrying former US naval intelligence officer, reveal that he was thoroughly thrown by the news that his members, mostly ex-squaddies, might be directly linked to – shock horror – prostitution. "Someone I respect in the Pentagon emailed me a very uncomplimentary note asking WTF [What-The-Fuck] was going on."

Peter immediately contacted several US army officers, as well as all his PSCAI members, to say Tori was using the group's logo without permission. He emphasised: "Your understanding of the seriousness of this situation and the potentially detrimental secondary effects to our organization is critical."

Mercenaries in Iraq have hired assassins from South Africa, shot at innocent Iraqi drivers, engaged in gun battles with insurgents and cheated on their bills. But they view the presence of one prostitute as the real danger to their respectability.

AIRPORT EXPANSION

Closing the Lydd?

ARE the wheels finally coming off Saudi arms dealer Sheikh Fahad's plans to turn the little airfield at Lydd, in Romney Marsh, into a huge new London airport (*Eyes passim*)?

A panel of planning inspectors appointed by the government to go through the South East Plan with a fine-toothed comb concluded last month that it would be "inappropriate" to include any reference to the potential of developing Lydd Airport in the document, which will guide strategic development in the region for the next 20 years.

In *Eye* 1130 we reported that a draft of the South East Plan produced by the South East England Regional Assembly (SEERA) and put out for consultation in 2005, gave full backing to development of Lydd, stating that "the potential of Lydd airport is supported... up to two million passengers per annum". That support was later withdrawn after SEERA decided the airport was a local, not regional, issue.

Despite the airport, now calling itself London Ashford Airport (LAA), and Kent county council both pushing for expansion to be put back into the plan, the inspectors' report says they are "unconvinced as to the extent to which the airport could act as a major economic driver" given that Kent International airport is nearby at Manston. They also noted concerns from locals and environmental campaigners, including the impact on "internationally important" birdlife in the marshes.

Being excluded from the plan will not prevent expansion, but the inspectors say the airport will have to go through the normal development control process. That process isn't going too well for LAA either. It has already applied for permission to build a 444-metre runway extension and a new terminal, but Shepway council rejected its environmental statements as "inadequate" and has asked for a better effort before it will consider the application.

REGULATION

Safety lite

WITH darkly appropriate timing the government announced its latest move to free business of responsibility, a draft code of practice for regulators, just a day before a court in Edinburgh fined ICL Plastics £400,000 for negligence leading to an explosion that killed nine people and injured 33 in 2004.

The draft code reduces the threat of the random inspections that are the essential incentive for businesses to prioritise safety and prevent incidents like the ICL explosion. The idea of holding offending firms to account for their actions is relegated to secondary importance behind more "constructive" and "proportionate" response to breaches. This prompted protests from the Centre for Corporate Accountability (CCA) that basic justice for victims is being neglected.

The code also gives regulators a further task. They "should recognise that a key element of their activity will be to allow, or even encourage, economic progress..." – a recipe for confusion at best for health and safety inspectors and others and, according to the CCA, likely to "prevent important health and safety reforms".

Nor can the new code be blamed on laissez-faire Tony Blair for it has Gordon Brown's fingerprints all over it. It emerged from a 2005 review Brown commissioned from Sainsbury chairman Philip Hampton (who quickly became Sir Philip).

As *Eye* 1141 revealed, Hampton rose to prominence as British Gas finance director in the 1990s when it neglected the safety of its pipelines, despite warnings, in favour of corporate finance deals. An explosion, killing a family of four, was the result. Transco, as the relevant part of British Gas became, was subsequently fined a record £15m for what the judge called a "serious failure of many years". But who needs pesky regulations anyway?

YOUNG OFFENDERS

Blasted Heath

WITH *what must by now be a weary* sense of déjà vu, prison inspectors published another damning report on Stoke Heath young offenders' institute (*Eyes passim*) based on an unannounced inspection.

The segregation unit at the Shropshire YOI was "unacceptably grubby" while a lack of cleaning materials "led some young people to clean their cells with their prison issue clothing". Access to showers was poor, there was too little purposeful activity and juveniles are still routinely strip-searched without a risk assessment. "Stoke Heath remained ill-equipped to manage vulnerable juveniles," said the report.

Stoke Heath was found to be so dreadful and unsafe in 2000 that the then chief inspector of prisons, Sir David Ramsbotham, recommended that two of its wings should not be used at all after more than 700 youngsters were injured within eight months. It then made some improvements, but in the new report prison inspectors expressed disappointment that there had been "little improvement" since their last visit and that some aspects of the regime had "deteriorated".

So what does the Youth Justice Board, which sets and monitors standards in youth custody, say about all this? Nothing. It has remained silent, but did manage to put out a statement "strongly condemning" the recent prison officers' strike.

You can contact the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017 or email: strobes@private-eye.co.uk

In the City

SO the Labour government and Tony Blair are going to get their £20bn reward for the shabby deal under which they killed off the investigation by the Serious Farce Office into BAE Systems before it breached the secrecy of the Saudi royal family's Swiss bank accounts.

A low-key announcement is expected shortly that BAE has duly received the Typhoon fighter contract which the Saudis threatened to drop if the SFO case was not closed – proving (as if there was ever any doubt) that corruption pays and so too does failing to prosecute it.

Meanwhile the SFO could face another embarrassing setback to the second major prong of the BAE probe in South Africa where there is said to be a similar lack of *enthusiasm* for any prosecution. SFO investigators were recently in South Africa and were received politely but local observers do not expect much more.

"Don't just stand there dithering, woman. PREVARICATE!"

The reason is that the BAE deal was far too close to key figures in the ruling African National Congress party. Indeed, the party is suspected of having been the major beneficiary of the 1999 deal. BAE provided over-priced Hawk and Gripen aircraft as part of a £5bn arms deal which also involved French and German companies. There were a number of local and foreign middle men who collected a cut but the ANC is expected to have done best.

The influential ANC treasurer-general Mendi Msimang, though he didn't benefit himself, is said to know all about the cash flows surrounding the BAE deal but is unlikely to want that emerging in a British court. Especially when there is a presidential election on the horizon that is splitting the party.

Then there is the long and close friendship between Prince Bandar, the main Saudi target of the SFO probe, and not just president Thabo Mbeki but also the saintly Nelson Mandela, neither of whom received a penny. A discouraging word from Bandar is likely to carry far more weight than any request from the SFO for information or co-operation. And it is not as if South Africa is a hot-bed of anti-corruption. Corruption is so endemic that the idea of collaborating in exposing bad deeds by the government itself is laughable. The motto for senior ANC figures is: "I did not engage in the struggle against apartheid to end up poor."

High profile corruption cases require political will. As the Saudi case showed. There is likely to be no such will in South Africa to assist the SFO. And just like Britain, South Africa could easily play the national interest card.

Ironically prosecutors may decide charges should be resurrected against the French group THINT, formerly Thales, which also participated in the giant arms deal. But that is because the Mbeki faction wants to damage powerful ANC presidential candidate Jacob Zuma. Zuma has been implicated in payments from THINT via its middle man and via Zuma's adviser, Schabir Sheik, who has been jailed for fraud.

Similar political problems could also prevent any progress in the Qatar part of the BAE investigation where the target is the most influential member of the royal family who was paid by BAE via Jersey trust accounts.

All of which could leave the SFO with the crumbs represented by Tanzania, Romania, the Czech Republic and Chile.

THE COLLAPSE of the rescue deal for Equator Exploration also has a strong link to South Africa and the ANC. The deal fell through last week because it was said to have proved impossible to complete the necessary documentation by the agreed end-August deadline. No extension was requested which raises some questions about whether that was the only reason.

Equator was going to be taken over by CAMAC International which is run by Texas-based Nigerian multi-millionaire Kase Lawal. He was expected to be able to make a greater succcess of Equator's oil ambitions offshore of Nigeria and Sao Tome than Wade Cherwayko, the Canadian chief executive who has already busted out once there to shareholders' cost with Abacan Resources.

Lawal was involved in the Irish company Tuskar Resources when it was also seeking to hit it big offshore Nigeria. He resigned from the board in 2001 when the company hit problems with its Nigerian partners.

Lawal featured in a major row in South Africa four years ago when it emerged that he had been inserted into a supposed 1999 government-to-government oil deal between Nigeria and South Africa. Two South African Oil Company (SOAC) entities had been established, one in the Cayman Islands and the other in South Africa. Both were controlled 49 percent or 75 percent by CAMAC. The South African one also involved several figures from the ANC. However, it was the Cayman SAOC what got the oil and sold it on at a minimum £1m a year profit. The suspicion was that part of this found its way into the ANC coffers. Once again Mendi Msimang was said to know a lot about what had gone on.

Ironically SAOC appeared again in the abortive Equator deal. A company of that name agreed to provide a $5m facility to the hard-pressed Equator. But was that the Cayman or the South African version? Whichever it was, this SAOC was said to be wholly owned by CAYMAC. So what happened to the mysterious 25 percent shareholder in the Cayman company and its South African twin or the ANC investors in the latter company?

Whether former Conservative minister for Africa Baroness Lynda Chalker will be celebrating the latest turn of events at Equator, where she is a non-executive director, remains to be seen. As does when the company – which has also lost its chairman, Sam Jonah – will resume dealings on AIM. Like Abacan, Equator soared to 400p but then crashed to 20p before the suspension.

THE latest chapter of the sub-prime crisis has revealed once again how very clever overpaid people in the City can be very stupid when their greedy glands get too excited.

The problems at Barclays and other banks and hedge funds involving collateralised debt obligations (CDOs) introduced two new names – conduits and structured investment vehicles, aka SIV-lites. This was the world of would-be new masters of the universe such as Edward Cahill of Barclays Capital, which may only have lost up to £75m through its CDO deals but has lost a whole lot more in reputation.

"Conduits" involve a bank raising money for corporate clients from big investors looking for short-term higher returns by selling commercial paper/debt issued by the conduits. Increasingly a rag bag of assets was put into the conduits which came to include bad sub-prime mortgages. The cash from the conduit paper/debt bought the assets from the bank client. The bank ran the conduit and was paid big fees. It may also guarantee to provide funding as a last resort. The amounts involved in this type of funny-money commercial paper exceed $1 trillion.

SIV-lites were set up mainly by hedge funds but also banks like Barclays to profit from the difference between borrowing interest rates on such commercial paper deals and the much higher returns on sub-prime mortgages. The SIV-lites ended up issuing their own paper and using the cash to buy sub-prime mortgages.

But both involve a basic banking mistake. They raised money short term, usually 90 days, by selling commercial paper to lend long on items like mortgages which ran for years. Borrowing short to lend long was and is and always will be a banking no-no.

So what a surprise that it has created so many red faces and lost jobs among those who should have known better. As soon as the commercial paper could not be refinanced when it fell due, the conduits and SIV-lites were in deep doo-doo as the assets were unsaleable and/or losing their value.

The sub-prime crisis shows once again that in the City all too often nobody knows anything.

LITTLE more than a year after it was launched as Britain's answer to the FBI, the Serious Organised Crime Agency is already looking to cut staff as it seeks to live within its tight budgets.

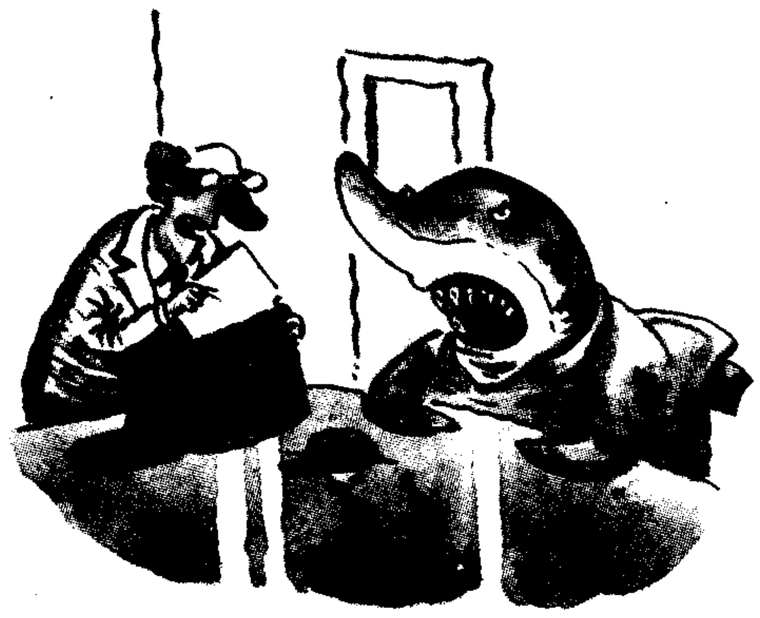
Insiders say that up to 300 jobs could be on the line as SOCA struggles to hit its ambitious targets for drug and asset seizures. Last year it missed both. The view from within SOCA is that it could take years to achieve what the Labour government promised.

SOCA has already consumed the Assets Recovery Agency – another Labour creation which was seen to have failed. The budget cuts could be helped by the departure of many of the police officers who arrived particularly with the National Crime Squad and who are concerned about protecting their generous pensions and complain about less attractive terms of service. Morale is said to be sinking and the agency is seen as far too bureaucratic.

'Slicker'

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE & RIGG



"Ok, we'll go with the usual... you mistook him for a seal..."

FOI SPECIAL

PALACE IN WONDERLAND

GORDON BROWN's calls for a new era of openness don't seem to have reached staff at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office records department who deal with Freedom of Information requests.

Philip Murphy, professor of British and Commonwealth History at Reading University, recently asked the department to review its decision to "retain" files from 1970 titled, "Position of the Monarchy in the Commonwealth". After much brooding the FCO sent the material – but the documents were heavily "redacted", ie censored, because "some of the information constitutes personal data, the disclosure of which would contravene data protection principles".

Since the files had been widely circulated, Murphy suspected that other copies might be in the public domain. And so it proved: he soon found uncensored versions. Thus, for once, we can see what the FCO is trying to keep from the public.

One 1970 Whitehall memo concerns whether the governor-general of Canada should be treated as a head of state when he visits the Netherlands. The memo points out that the governor-general is not actually head of state: the Queen is. Then comes a passage which the FCO saw fit to blank out: "Nevertheless, it was the Queen's wish that the governors-general of her realm should be treated with particular courtesy, and I hope therefore that the Netherlands government would go as far as possible in making the visit agreeable in every way."

Another memo advises that when the governor-general of Australia visits other countries in the region "he should be received with the greatest honours short of those accorded to the Queen herself". Then comes a censored sentence: "We understand from the Palace that this would be the Queen's own wish."

Shock, horror! And these are the livelier bits. As Professor Murphy says in a letter to the records department, comparison of the two sets of documents suggests that the privacy exemptions from the Freedom of Information Act are being used "to airbrush from the historical record evidence of the day-to-day role of the Palace in the public life of the Commonwealth."

But is the Foreign Office to blame? Apparently not. The impetus for this censorship comes from the palace itself, which has twigged that the Queen can suppress anything about her by exploiting a legal loophole to pretend that she is always a private citizen, even when performing official duties. Section 40 of the FoI Act provides an exemption for material which would count as "personal data" under the Data Protection Act.

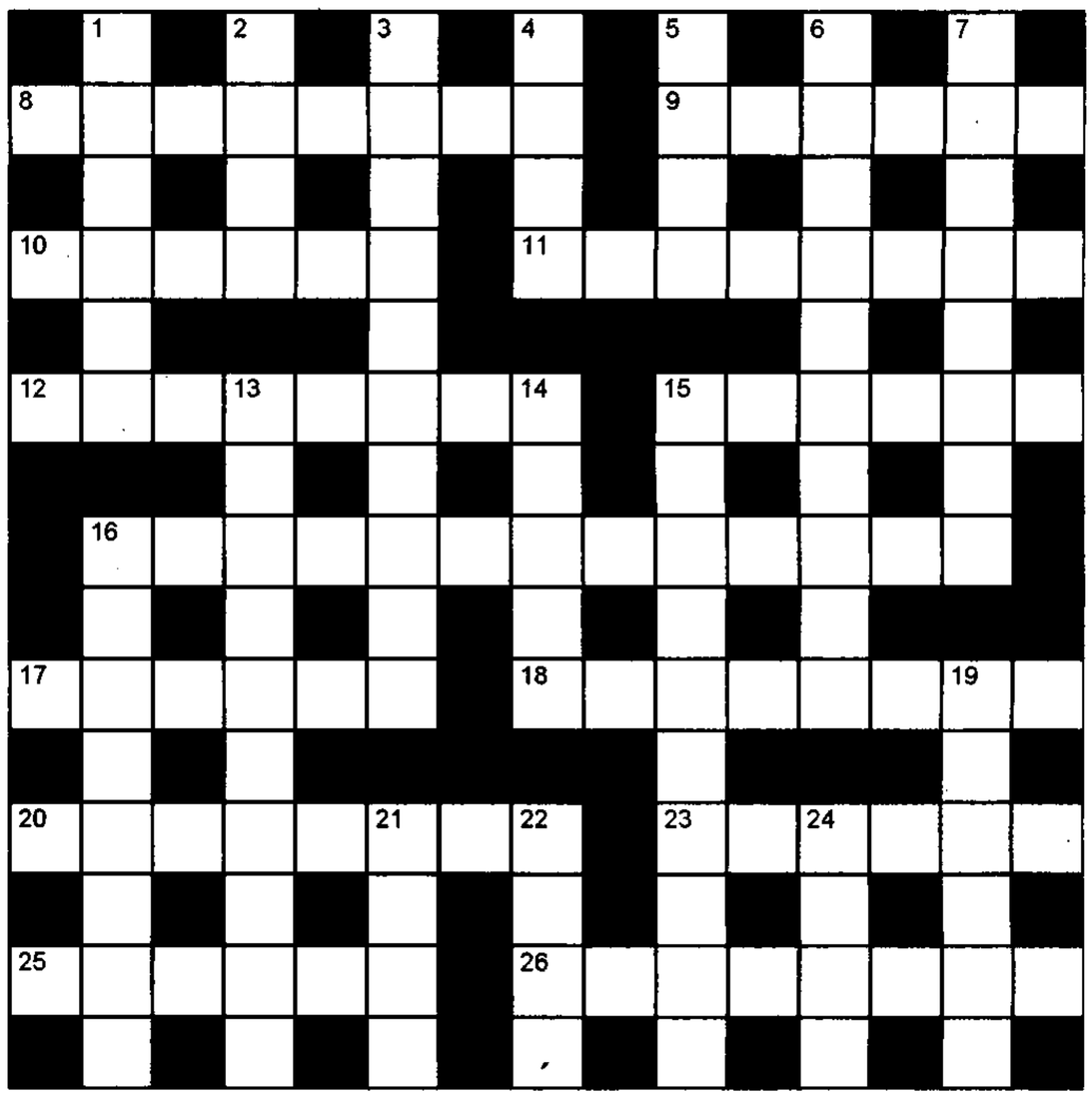
So the Palace is trying to enforce a system of blanket censorship which would be Stalinist if it were actually applied consistently. As it is, with uncensored copies of her "opinions" already available, it's just plain bonkers.

EYE CROSSWORD 348

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 21 September 2007

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

8 Wood possibly scores holding one – pig! (8)
9 See 3dn.
10 Things to do: 1) Getting low-down on duck's arse (6)
11 Lots of bucks set about beginning to deflower Heather Mooning (8)
12 Kill Nick and Roger! (5,3)
15 The place for MPs to get end away, Wimbledon? (6)
16 Pisspoor dim rival introduced as follower of Boris (8,5)
17 'Muscles' has flipping whopper – go down with assistance! (6)
18 Dotty said ice cream might help fill a small jug (8)
20 Thatcher clobbered (with tip of elbow, not handbag) a piss-taker (8)
23 Solid end removed from surgical appliance – Tony disheartened (6)
25 Brown accepting alternative work backing is "organised persecution" (6)
26 Fellow nancies buggered backs (8)

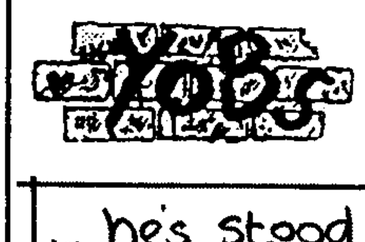
DOWN

1 Month getting stuffed with endless rehashed Gore gibberish (6)
2 See 5dn.
3/9 John's sort of schoolboy repartee? (10,6)
4 Was a viewer supplied with your organ? (4)
5/2 Climax that hurt inside of Paddy (not the first) (8)
6 Representative Tim became sick embracing Labour's leader (10)
7 Leader of Tories: run aground, floored, in decline (4,4)
13 Charles, coming out with rot, was once a thorn in Blair's side (5,5)
14 Fine utterances made by Archer which give access to the prick? (5)
15 Prepared cola nut and pig stuffing (10)
16 Little woman needs her support with balls-inverting sex aid (8)
19 One mad to give you head after noon, say? (6)
21 Place for stiff one before start of Baltic Cruise (4)
22 Labour's last uncertainty: time for a split (4)
24 Girl clutching length, it gives rigidity to one's member (4)

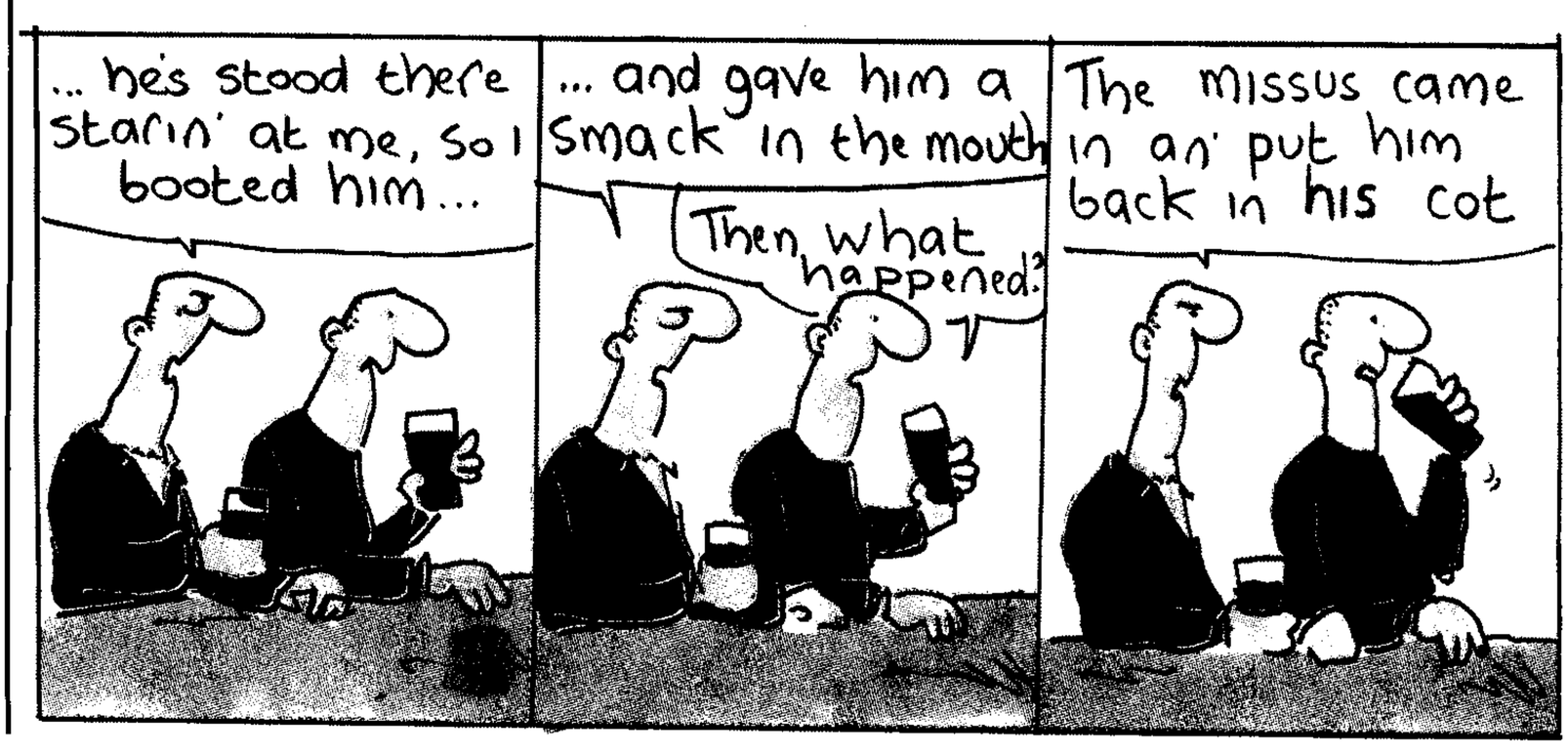
Crossword 347 winner: DOROTHY MACEDO

ACROSS: 7 Demeans 8 Up yours 9 Unorthodox 12 Stewart 13 Singe 14/22 Restoring public confidence 17 Dumps 19 In ruins 24 Spewing 25 Agility.

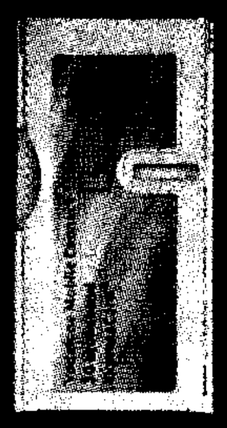
DOWN: 1/11 Dean Rusk 2/21 George Bush 3 On the air 4 Apexes 5 Doorknob 6 Brasseries 10 Detention 12 Speed bumps 15 Tomahawk 16 Porridge 18 Second 20 Ideals 23 Cute.



HUSBAND


... he's stood there starin' at me, so I booted him...
... and gave him a smack in the mouth
Then what happened?
The missus came in an' put him back in his cot

Find a lost hour



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Jim Lawrence

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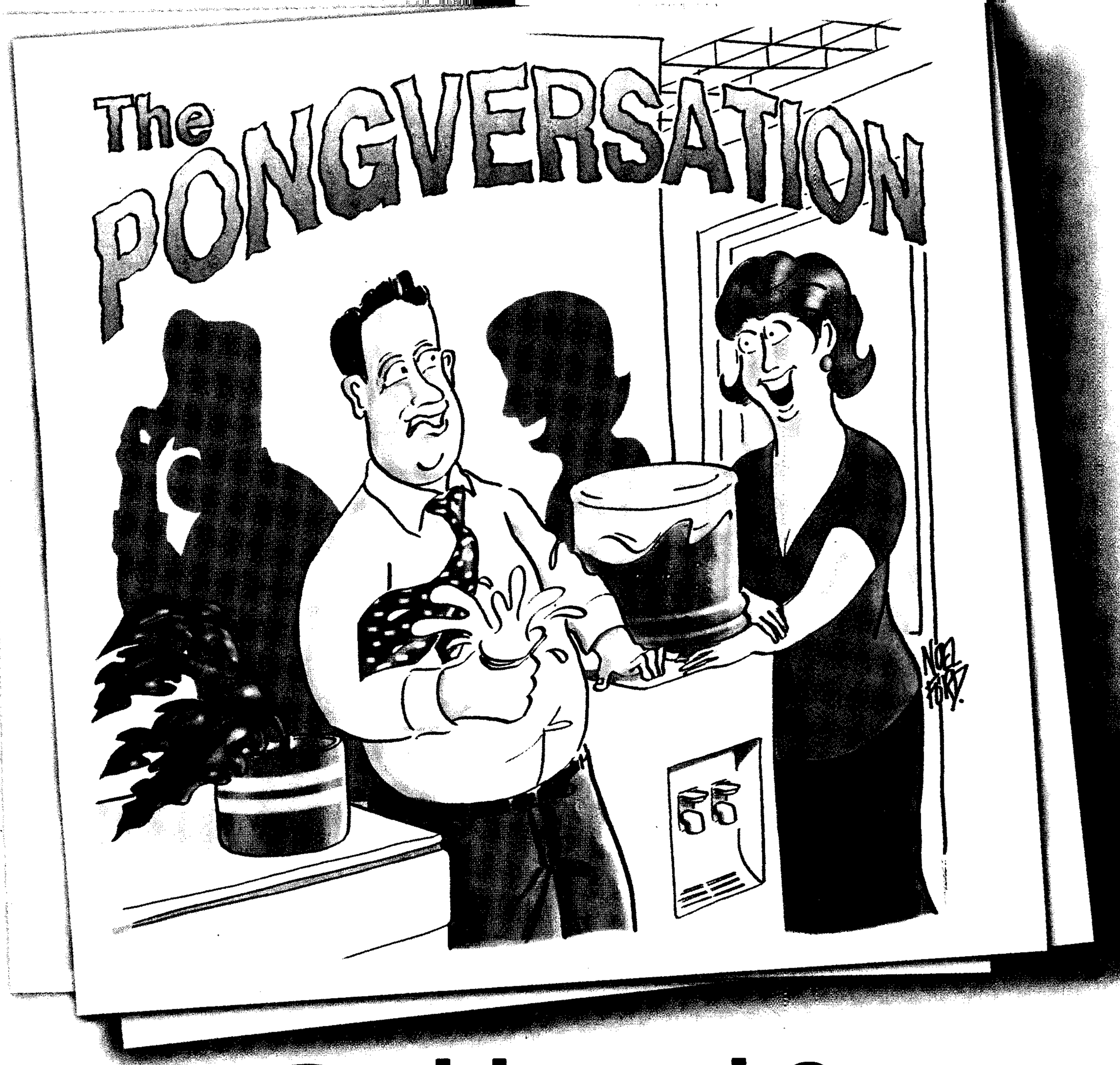

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MI5 SUED in Florida Federal Court for assault / attempted homicide, http://www.mi5.com/legal/orlando/orlando.htm

CORRUPTION AT PROPERTY CLOSING DATES SCOTLAND: investigative journalist seeks tales of suspicion / corruption; strictly confidential. InvestJournal@aol.com

LEARN BRIDGE QUICKLY: October 6th/7th. London. Details: www.learnbridgeinaweekend.com Telephone: 07944 768 643.

LORD BANDEY of Medmenham is 60. Happy birthday your Lordship. (Ed: Shurely shome mishtake!)

Eye Need

WAR VETERAN. STILL traumatised, cannot cope any longer. Urgently need finance to retain a semblance of normality for myself. S/C: 08-93-00. A/C: 04224989.

YOUNG ACTOR / WRITER seeks £3000 to fulfil promise. Thank you. S/C: 40-35-04. A/C: 12135825.

IN DEEPEST DESPAIR: Please help devoted disabled daughter (criminal injuries) keep War veteran father (dementia) at home. Incurred massive council homecare debt and threatened litigation. 200% increase = £41,600 yearly! DESPICABLE. This genuine advertiser needs miracle. Any kindness offered – truly appreciated. Hope to repay one day. S/C: 87-70-01. A/C: 06204555. Reply Box 215419.

WANT TO STUDY CHEK L1, cannot afford fees of £2500.00. S/C: 20-39-07. A/C: 80392065. genuinerequest@yahoo.co.uk

CREATIVE SEEKS immediate cash injection of £1000+. Versatile 41 yoa, anything legal considered; savernake_forest@yahoo.co.uk

GREEDY BANK ON MY TAIL! Greedy bank chasing me hard for Personal Guarantee that will destroy me and my family – risk losing home and kids. All donations appreciated – no amount too small! S/C: 40-47-86. A/C: 60756776.

GRATITUDE ARTICLE read despite two jobs; can't pay debt of £3000. S/C: 08-61-30. A/C: 70328725. Reclaim and add ref: 5407580829844314.

ACTOR SEEKS CHEAP / FREE place to live in London. Anything interesting considered. rafebeckley@hotmail.com

20K NEEDED TO stop bankruptcy caused by bastard ex. Any help greatly appreciated. S/C: 20-98-75. A/C: 10082716.

TIRED OF CORPORATE AND INSTITUTIONAL LIES? Want to shout the truth but can't? I am setting up a place for you to safely tell the truth. Any help welcome. canofworms@hotmail.co.uk

NEED MONEY for a flight to Nepal, so that I can continue working for a human rights NGO. Any size donations appreciated. gabrielle_elliott@hotmail.com

ENTHUSIASTIC YOUNG MALE wants exciting job with travel. soudamirai@hotmail.com

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PASTOR NEEDS new musical instruments: please help. S/C: 30-64-37. A/C: 17959568.

FORCED TO LEAVE JOB due to chronic illness. Have debts of £10,000 and no income. Please help. S/C: 08-91-04. A/C: 01398737.

STRUGGLING AUTHOR in need of financial help. Debts are crippling me. Any help appreciated. S/C: 40/47/79. A/C: 70628980.

YOU CAN CHANGE MY LIFE. Will you? Need funds to live the Italian dream. Please. Help me escape … Can't wait for public sector pay rise! S/C: 30-93-91. A/C: 10878168.

BOMBAY TAXIWALLAH requires £600 to repay father's debts. Dhanyavad. S/C: 20-31-52. A/C: 50272760.

BANKCRUPT CLIENTS: I'm 100K adrift. Will compose music, design website or accept a kind donation. S/C: 82-63-31. A/C: 10261244. Email: dg@soundsmove.com

HARD-WORKING HUSBAND AND DAD. Things could not get worse. Family don't deserve imminent crash. Never thought I would do this. Please help. S/C: 16-60-50. A/C: 11111814. Telephone: 07821 753 236.

DOUBLE-FIRST CAMBRIDGE, no funding – £11,000 MPhil / PhD on Marlowe and Renaissance drama. Contact Burrows@cantab.net – thank you.

YOUNG, ENTHUSIASTIC COUPLE, qualified Arborist and Biologist, seek financial help for carbon footprint free worldwide travel to broaden their knowledge within their fields. Approx £5000 required. Please email a_goudy@hotmail.com With thanks.

EXCITING FEMALE ROCK SINGER / artist requires financial backer. www.myspace.com/debbieleighdriver Telephone: 07753 628 666.

DESPERATE SINGLE PARENT needs £4,000 for daughter's tuition. Any help appreciated. S/C: 60-19-27. A/C: 29521130.

STRUGGLING TO PAY DEBTS: Any benevolence graciously accepted. Thank you. S/C: 11-14-35. A/C: 00395471.

I HAVE CHRONIC ILLNESSES, 14K debt, need full body lift cosmetic surgery, 15K. Help? S/C: 07-44-56. A/C: 21730094. mistyblue2424@yahoo.co.uk

VISIONARY ARTIST needs 60K to realise extraordinary work on glass. Received with gratitude. thedreamgrocer@gmail.com S/C: 08-93-00. A/C: 01307650.

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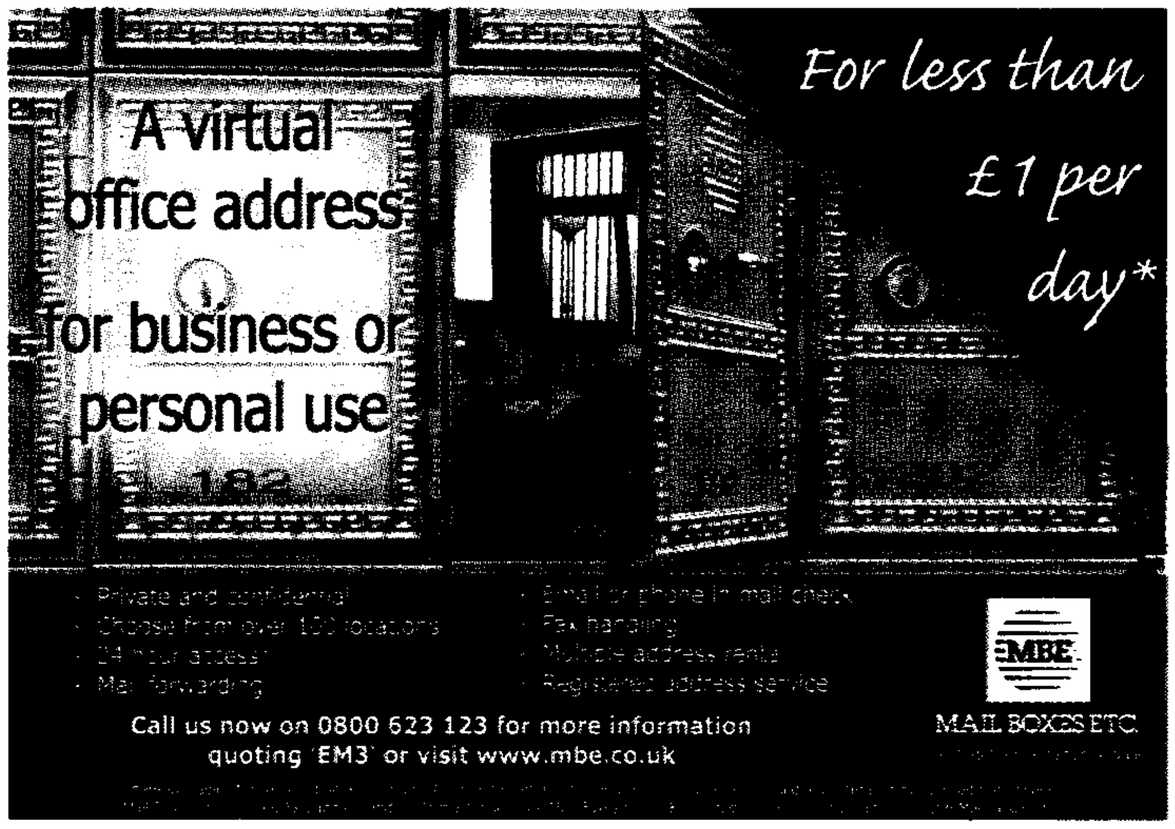
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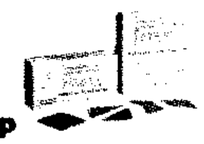

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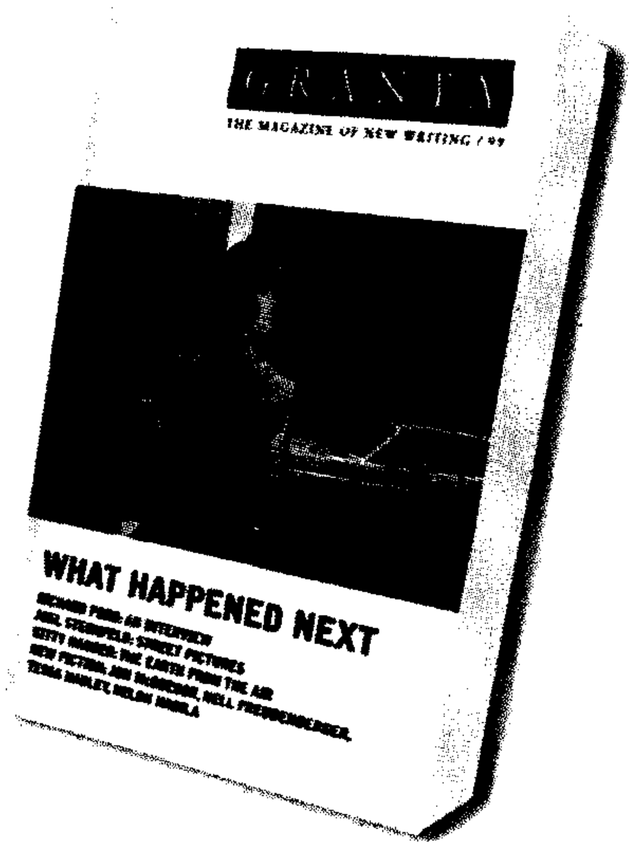

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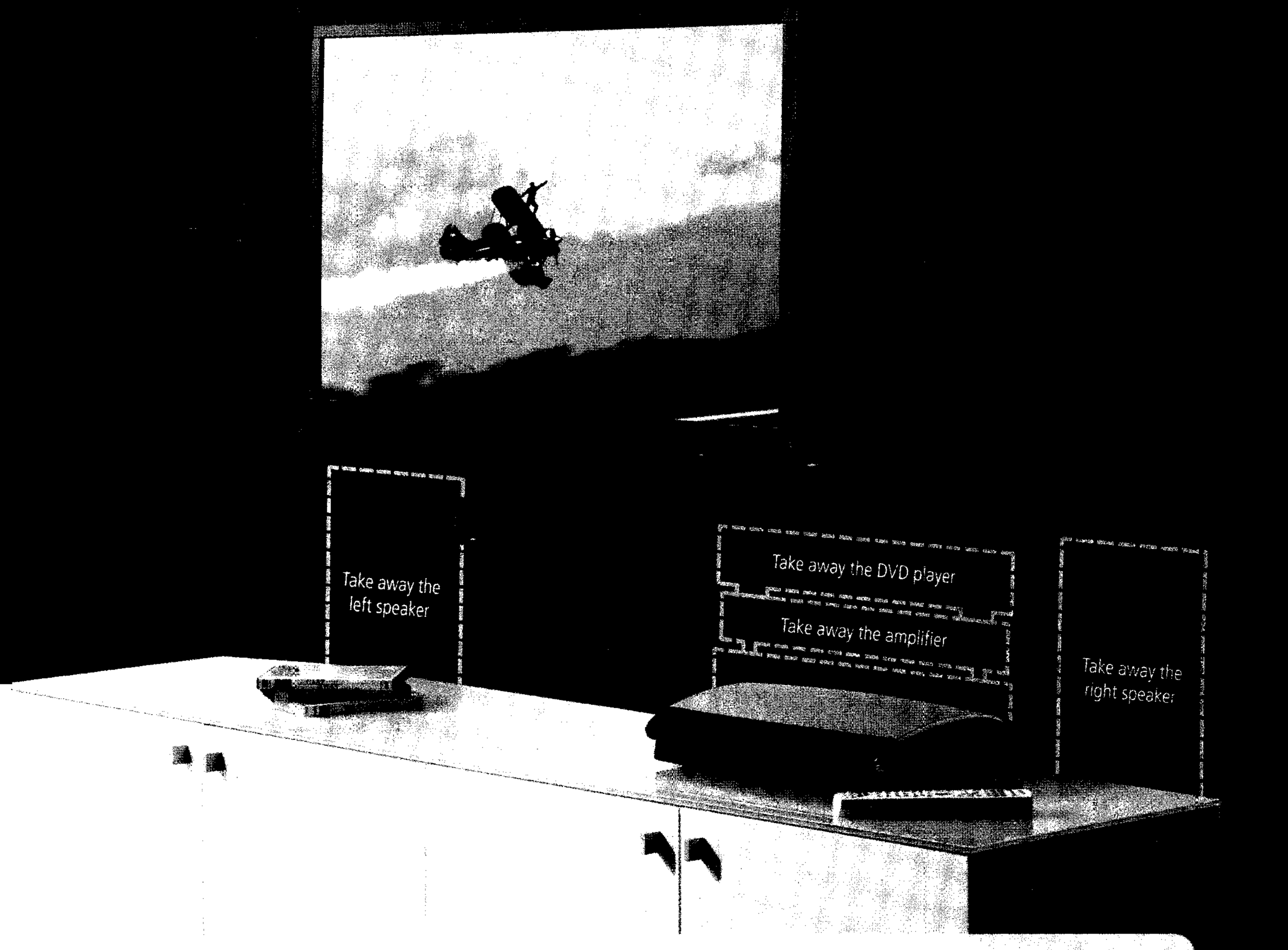

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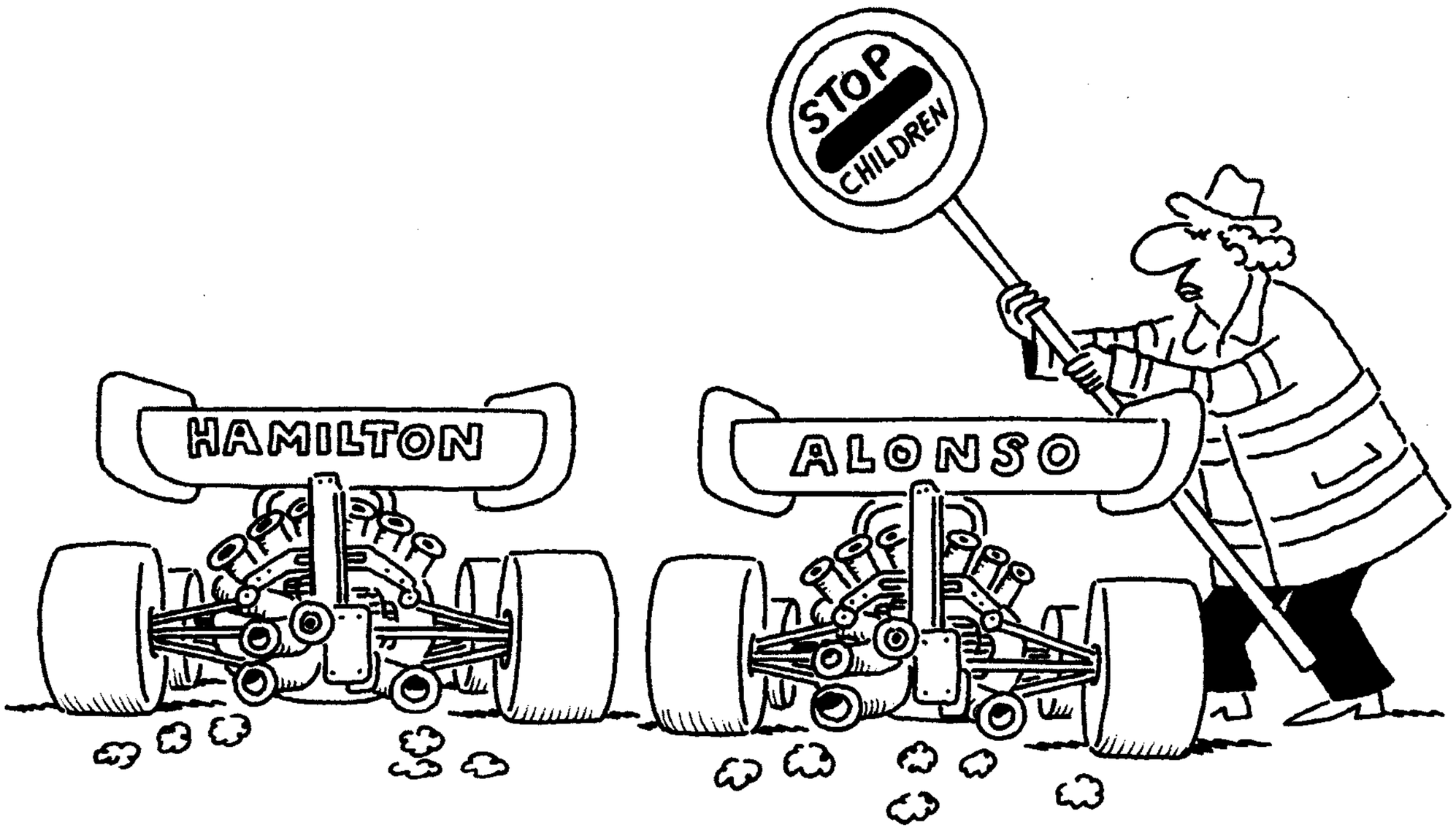

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